Access to services with interpreters
Access to services with interpreters

User views

Claire Alexander, Rosalind Edwards and Bogusia Temple with Usha Kanani, Liu Zhuang, Mohib Miah and Anita Sam
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Our thanks also go to the research assistants who accessed, and conducted the interviews with, participants and translated the spoken interviews into written English. In addition, they read through drafts of this report and made valuable comments. Our acknowledgement of their vital role is signalled by our inclusion of their names as authors alongside our own (apart from our Kurdish researcher, who did not want his name published). Nevertheless, we take responsibility for the data and arguments presented here.

Finally, we want to thank the participants in this research, both those who helped us generally and in particular those who took part in the interviews. People often lived in difficult circumstances and had many other issues to deal with, yet gave their time to help us with our research. We have changed their names to protect their anonymity.
1 Introduction to the issues

Introduction

This report explores the experiences of people who need interpreters in order to gain access to, and use of, health, welfare, legal and other services. There are no official figures collected on the number of people living in Britain who need interpreters. Modood and colleagues (1997), however, estimate that just under a third of the Asian ‘communities’ taking part in their large-scale survey of minority ethnic diversity and disadvantage spoke little or no English. Moreover, English-language competence was not distributed equally within these groups, reflecting variable socio-economic background and education, length of settlement in the UK, and also relating to gender and age. A further indication of the need for interpreters comes from the Home Office’s 2001 Citizenship Survey (Attwood et al., 2003), which included a broader range of minority ethnic groups comprising over a third of their total sample – 36 per cent of these often spoke languages other than English at home and just under 14 per cent needed someone to translate some or all of the questions for them during the survey interview (our calculations from their data). The differences between these two figures suggests that, although a significant percentage use ‘mother tongue’ languages at home, this does not preclude a substantial degree of English-language capability within these groups overall.

What is not in doubt, though, is that the world of those who speak little or no English, in Britain, can be significantly constrained. There are links between English-language disadvantage and social exclusion and deprivation. Those who most need to register with, and draw on, the services of education, health, legal and social welfare professionals and officials may be least able to do this because of language difficulties (see, for example, Ahmed, 2002; Audit Commission, 1993; 2000; Baxter et al., 1996; Gerrish, 2001; Kansu, 1997; Netto et al., 2001; Pettigrew, 2003; Robinson, 2002; Stills et al., 1995; Yu, 2000). There is evidence to suggest they are also least integrated into the mainstream labour market (Performance and Innovation Unit, 2002).

Concerns about the exclusion of some minority ethnic groups from mainstream services and society, and the ability to speak English, however, have coalesced to become a political, rather than a merely pragmatic, issue. It is important to acknowledge this broader political context, which places the topic of access to services with interpreters as a controversial and highly charged issue.

The political context of language use

Although promoting English-language skills has long formed a part of the rhetoric and policies of integration of minority ethnic communities, in recent years the issue of English-language usage among migrant communities has moved to the centre of
political debates around social inclusion and the future of multiculturalism. Where previously ‘mother tongue’ competency was seen as an integral part of the maintenance of positive ethnic community identity, and was supported (alongside English-language classes) by government Section 11 funding, the past decade has seen the erosion of financial and political goodwill. Indeed, ‘mother tongue’ language use now forms one of the primary targets in the Government’s rhetoric around ‘citizenship’ and ‘community cohesion’.

In the wake of the disturbances across the North of England in the spring and summer of 2001, lack of English-language facility was identified as an ‘important factor’ in the maintenance of ethnic segregation and cultural hostility between white and Asian communities (Denham Report, 2001, p. 12) and in underpinning high levels of unemployment and poverty among Muslim groups. In an essay on ‘Rethinking Britishness’, the Home Secretary wrote:

> We must strive to connect people from different backgrounds, tackle segregation and overcome mutual hostility and ignorance. Of course, one factor in this is the ability of new migrants to speak English – otherwise they cannot get good jobs, or share in wider social debate ... For those long settled in the UK ... speaking English enables parents ... to participate in wider modern culture.

(Quoted in The Guardian, 16 September 2002, our emphasis)

The new blueprint for citizenship education, laid out in the recent Crick Report (2003), has placed an explicit emphasis on ‘integration’, with language facility as a core measure of an individual’s merit for national inclusion. Aimed mainly at asylum seekers and the spouses of settled Asian communities, English-language education has become the cornerstone of cultural and cross-generational integration strategies:

> I ... welcome the emphasis on English – acquiring English is a pre-requisite to social integration, to further education and employment and to the well being of succeeding generations.

(Home Secretary, quoted in The Guardian, 3 September 2003)

Provision for classes in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), however, has been found to be in short supply and with long waiting lists (e.g. Griffiths, 2003). A similar situation exists for formal interpreting provision.
Provision of interpreting services

Several statutes are accompanied by explanatory memoranda and codes of practice that explicitly or implicitly recommend the use of interpreters (Department of Health, 2004; Saunders, 1994), including the Race Relations, Mental Health, Children, and NHS and Community Care Acts. Consistently, though, studies show that there is an acute lack of permanent in-house interpreters across a whole range of social provision, including primary health care, maternity care, housing, social services, counselling, mental health services, and criminal justice and immigration appeals (e.g. Baker et al., 1991; Baxter, 1997; Council on Tribunals, 1991; Edwards, 1993; Mental Health Act Commission, 1997; NACAB, 1994; Netto et al., 2001; Stills et al., 1995; Yu, 2000). This situation often results either in in-house bilingual employees being ‘called in’ to aid colleagues and act as interpreters, or users relying on friends or family. Racial stereotyping can exacerbate poor interpreting provision, for example with service providers assuming that any person who speaks an Asian language can communicate with all Asian service users, or assumptions about the capacity of older Chinese people to draw on their community’s resources. These are all established circumstances that find an echo in this report on users’ experiences of needing interpreters in order to access services.

Nonetheless, communication needs are increasingly being addressed by service providers, although these often seem to have ad hoc and uncertain funding. Interpreting services are located within local authorities, health services, the voluntary sector and the private sector, or partnerships of these, and are provided using a variety of delivery models and management arrangements (e.g. Department of Health, 2004; Schellekens, 2004). Depending on the source of provision, interpreters are employed either on full- or part-time contracts, or by the session, and are either provided free to users or users are charged. In some areas, interpreting services are available only during normal office hours and, in others, there are various arrangements for out-of-hours cover. In most services, bookings for interpreters are made by the professional rather than the client, and it is their judgement as to which minority language the interpreter needs to speak. In addition to face-to-face provision, telephone services have been set up (for example, Language Line, EITI and the National Interpreting Service) and there are also experiments with tele-video links and touch-screen kiosks.
There are no clearly established national guidelines or standards for interpreting service provision, although many providers set their own (discussed further in Chapter 6). There is also a growing emphasis on professionalisation, with recognised training and qualifications for interpreters. A National Register of Public Service Interpreters has been set up, and those registered are required to hold a qualification and follow a code of conduct. There is also advice provided to English-speaking professionals on how to work with interpreters. Phelan and Parkman’s (1995) advice to health professionals seeing patients with an interpreter, for example, includes addressing the patient in the second person, keeping control of
the consultation and appearing attentive when the patient responds. In addition to best practice on the part of both interpreters and English-speaking professionals, there is discussion of the models of provision, for example differences between, and relative merits of, professional interpreters, bilingual providers, community interpreters, interpreter-advocates (Department of Health, 2004; Schellekens, 2004; Thomson et al., 1999).

The vast majority of discussion, review and evaluation in the field of interpreting, however, is conducted from a service provider perspective. There has been little work that looks at users’ own experiences of interpreters, both professional and informal, from their point of view. There is even less research that looks at user preferences for who should interpret for them. In the few exceptions, the focus has been on a single service evaluation rather than on user views of their broad needs for interpreters (e.g. Gerrish, 2001; Healthy Communities Project, 1995; Kansu, 1997). In such work, the link between communication needs and the most appropriate provider to fill these needs is often assumed rather than investigated. Communication issues, for example in relation to trust and the use of family members, are seen as best solved by the provision of professional interpreters (e.g. Audit Commission, 2000; Rhodes and Nocon, 2003; Vydelingum, 2000). Generally, also, there are assumptions about the homogeneous nature of community for those with interpreting needs. Minority ethnic groups are often presented as internally homogeneous and equally placed in relation to service provision. These are issues that we will address later in this report.

An alternative approach, however, argues for a wider view of interpreting that is situated in an understanding and knowledge of people’s lives as a whole, rather than through a narrow focus on communication as technical competence, and missed or mistranslations, or a snapshot view of people’s lives (Gerrish, 2001; Robinson, 2002). Decisions about who is best to interpret need to be seen within the wider context of decision making in families, communities and cultures, and to be framed within the choices and constraints of people’s lives. Our research takes this alternative approach, focusing on the people who need interpreting provision to access services rather than the perspective of service providers.

**Our study**

The starting point of our research is the experience of *users*, who are likely to require interpreters across a range of aspects of their lives. Our research aimed to:

- examine the experiences and understanding of people who need interpreters in order to gain access to, and use of, health, welfare and other services and supports
Access to services with interpreters

• place services users’ experiences in the biographical and cultural context of their lives as a whole, in order to explore how needing interpreters to access and use services may be differentially understood

• point to guideline issues that policy makers, service providers and interpreters need to take into consideration when working with people with little or no English-language competence.

The study is thus concerned with drawing out general lessons for people working in a range of organisational settings, rather than concentrating on technical issues for best practice, or specific issues for users of one particular sort of service.

Structure of the report

This report is structured so as, initially, to introduce the context for the research and for the lives of the people we interviewed. It then examines and overviews the broad contours of our sample’s views and experiences of access to services with interpreters. This is followed by a detailed exploration of these broad findings, explaining the issues and understandings that underlie them. Finally, we draw conclusions and make recommendations arising from our findings.

• Chapter 2 looks at the context for our research. It discusses the background to our selection of five particular minority ethnic groups, looking at their migration histories. We then describe the ways in which we accessed our sample and the social characteristics of that sample.

• Chapter 3 is concerned with ideals and process in accessing and using interpreters for our sample. We look at when they feel that they need an interpreter, the qualities that they feel are important in a good interpreter and the role that they want them to play, and their experiences of accessing and using different interpreting resources. We note that, for the most part, people’s experiences of professional interpreters are not particularly good and that they express a preference for family and friends, considering them more ‘trustworthy’.

• Chapter 4 begins our explanation of the overview findings in Chapter 3. We consider the broader context for our sample’s lives, focusing on different aspects of ‘community’. We explore the meanings of ‘community’ for our sample, looking at differences between and within our different sample groups, addressing issues of culture, difference, place, and the intersections between community, family and friends, including drawing on networks for interpretation. Finally, we address issues of marginalisation for the people we interviewed, both within their own ethnic communities, and within wider British society and services.
• Chapter 5 provides an in-depth look at ‘trust’ as a crucial issue emerging from our research. We address the context for ‘trust’ for the people we interviewed, in terms of their views of the general trustworthiness of the society in which they live. We note how this draws attention to issues of personal and abstract trust. This is followed by an exploration of the issue of trust in relation to interpreters, focused around case studies. We draw out the attributes of personal trust in family and friends as interpreters, and those of abstract trust in professional interpreters. We also address the strategies that people have used where they do not trust their interpreter. Finally, we draw out the implications of our discussion, which point towards people’s valuing of a particular mix of personal and abstract trust in interpreters.

• Chapter 6 overviews the findings that have emerged from our research and uses these as a basis for policy and provision recommendations. We contrast our sample’s views of good interpreting practice with the main qualities recommended in guidelines for professional interpreting. We point to the need to consider people’s use of interpreters within the broader context of their lives in developing policies and providing interpreting service. This includes the issue of the nature of trust. Our recommendations thus involve strategies for bringing together personal and abstract trust.
2 Researching lives in context

Introduction

In this chapter, we set the context for our research and its findings, moving from the broader background to the more specific situations for the people who we interviewed from the ethnic groups that are the focus of this report. First, at the broad level, we discuss the background to our selection of five particular minority ethnic groups, looking at their migration histories. We then move on to describe our specific sample, addressing their social characteristics. We also look at the process of accessing these people. Finally, we look at barriers to people learning English as part of the social context of their lives and their need to use interpreters to access services.

Migration histories

Britain has always been a country of migration (Parekh, 2000) and British migration patterns have a varied history. Since World War II, and until recently, immigration to the UK has been dominated by people from the former colonies, especially South Asia, the Caribbean and Africa. In the 1950s, immigration was primarily from the Caribbean and India, while immigration in the 1960s and 1970s was dominated by settlement from India, Pakistan and Asians from East Africa. Most of the Bangladeshi immigrant community arrived during the 1980s. Within recent years, however, refugee and asylum claims from populations in Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe have been a feature (Dustmann et al., 2003).

The five minority ethnic groups that we have chosen to focus on in this research are a range of established and recent migrant groups within the UK: Polish, Chinese, Gujerati Indian, Bangladeshi and Kurdish. Each group has a different population profile, and various sections are more or less likely to be in need of interpreters in order to use services, often based on age and gender. Given their different migration histories, each of our chosen groups has access to varying infrastructures of formal and informal networks of people who can act as interpreters if required.

Polish

A major phase of Polish migration to the UK occurred during World War II and immediate resettlement period, against the background of wartime upheaval and an ideological refusal to return to communist rule. Polish people settled in organised groups (such as whole military units, schools and hospitals), predominantly comprising young single men who later brought partners over from Poland as well as intermarrying with the local population (Sword, 1996). More recently, since the mid-1990s, Polish immigration has encompassed both economic migration and asylum seekers, the latter being largely from the Polish Roma minority.
Polish-born people form 0.1 per cent of the UK population (Census, 2001). There is no specified category for people of Polish origin born in the UK in official statistics, and generally their situation tends to be hidden within the ‘White’ category. Most people of Polish origin live in Greater London, but Greater Manchester has a small concentration. The older, established population tends to live in owner-occupied housing in suburban areas, with more recent migrants in rented accommodation in more deprived areas. Both of these sections of the population can lack (or, for older people, have lost) English-language fluency and need interpreters in order to use mainstream services.

**Chinese**

The main post-war period of Chinese settlement in the UK occurred in the late 1950s and 1960s, with the largest group coming from Hong Kong under rights of settlement. Young men left Hong Kong to escape deteriorating economic conditions in rural areas, attracted by the rise in demand for ethnic cuisine in the UK, and setting up a pattern of sponsored family migration (Song, 1999). There was also migration from Hong Kong just prior to the colony’s return to Chinese rule in 1997. From the 1980s on, there has also been migration from mainland China, in the form of both students coming to the UK to study and asylum seekers. Indeed, China was the fifth highest country by application for asylum in the UK in 2002 (BBC, 2003). People of Chinese origin form the smallest specified minority ethnic group at 0.4 per cent of the population of England and Wales, just under two-thirds of whom were born in China or Hong Kong (Census, 2001). Around half live in London, forming about 1 per cent of its population.

The Chinese population in the UK is said to be split into two halves – those who are well off and those who are not doing so well (Platt, 2002). Those doing well have high levels of qualifications, are self-employed and/or in managerial and professional occupations, and live in owner-occupied housing. Other Chinese, however, work in semi-skilled manual occupations, especially in the catering industry, and live in multiple-occupation rented accommodation. The age profile of the Chinese population is dominated by younger adults. Older people and more recent migrants are those who are likely to need interpreters to access mainstream services (Yu, 2000).
Indian migration to the UK occurred largely between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s. This was enabled both by the need for labour in the UK and by a small pre-existing population of Indian settlers who could provide information and support (Robinson, 1996). Migrants were mainly young men from a business background who were later joined by wives and children. The removal of rights of residents from Kenyan Asians in 1967 and expulsion of Ugandan Asians in 1972 added to settlement of Indian families in the UK, again with business backgrounds. Indians now form 2 per cent of the population of England and Wales and the largest specified minority ethnic group, about two-fifths of who were born in India (Census, 2001). Gujarati Indians (originating from Gujerat state in India, but including East African Asians) form the majority of the Indian population in the UK.

Those of Indian origin tend to have high rates of self-employment in both manufacturing and retail trades, with just under half of this minority ethnic group concentrated in the top two social classes (Platt, 2002). The majority live in owner-occupied housing, which has led to the development of relatively affluent Indian
communities, especially in outer London (Dorsett, 1998). The main concentration is in the Midlands, but people of Indian origin form just over 1 per cent of the population of Greater Manchester. The age profile is becoming dominated by second-generation younger adults, and it is usually the older generation, especially women, who are not fluent in English (Modood et al., 1997) and who need interpreters in order to use mainstream services.

**Bangladeshi**

Bangladeshi migration to the UK peaked during the 1980s with parents, wives and children coming to join the young men who had migrated during the 1960s and 1970s to work in manufacturing industries. Most originate from rural areas in the Sylhet region of Bangladesh. Bangladeshis form only 0.5 per cent of the population of England and Wales, the second smallest specified minority ethnic group, and just over half were born in Bangladesh (Census, 2001). They tend to be concentrated geographically in particular areas. Four-fifths live in London, with small but dense clusters in other areas such as the North West – people of Bangladeshi origin form just under 5 per cent of the population of Oldham, for example. Within these areas, they are largely housed in local authority accommodation in the less desirable properties in deprived wards (Dorsett, 1998).

A high proportion of the Bangladeshi population in the UK live below the established poverty line (Modood et al., 1997) and about a quarter of the working-age population are unemployed. Of those who are employed, over half work in the catering industry and in manual occupations. Poor education and qualifications, as well as a limited knowledge of English, are said to be factors in limiting Bangladeshi economic activity and achievement (Platt, 2002). The age profile is dominated by children and young people. It is older people generally, and especially women as both younger and older adults, who are less likely to be fluent in English (Modood et al., 1997) and so need interpreters in order to access mainstream services.

**Kurdish**

Kurdish people form minority populations predominantly in eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, north-western Iran and the southern Caucasus. Iraq was the top country by applicant for asylum in the UK in 2002 (prior to the US and UK military operations in 2003), Turkey the seventh and Iran the eighth (BBC, 2003). Kurdish people are not identified separately in records of asylum applications from these countries but are thought to account for a high proportion from Iraq and Turkey especially. As with people of Polish origin, those of Kurdish origin are subsumed within the ‘White’ category in official statistics.
Kurdish community organisations estimate that there are between 80,000 and 100,000 Kurds living in the UK, forming under 0.2 per cent of the population. Most of them arrived from the early 1990s onwards (Wahlbeck, 1998). The majority live in the north London area (Griffiths, 2000), usually in rented accommodation in deprived boroughs. Those in employment often work in the textile and catering industries (Eren, 1999). It is thought that the majority of the Kurdish population in the UK is made up of young adults and young families, a good proportion of who are not fluent in English (community organisations estimate up to 80 per cent) and need interpreters in order to use mainstream services.

The research process

As noted above, our research is based on semi-structured interviews with people needing interpreters from within these five different minority ethnic groups – Polish, Chinese, Gujerati Indian, Bangladeshi and Kurdish. We selected these groups because they represent a variety of experiences of migration to and settlement in Britain, in terms of length of presence, levels of integration or marginalisation, legal status (as citizens, as settlers, or as asylum seekers). They also vary between groups that have been highly visible in terms of academic research and policy
formulation (Bangladeshi and Gujerati) and those who are either overlooked (Chinese), subsumed into generic majority categories (Polish), or present new challenges (Kurdish).

One factor that was important in terms of the profile of the selected communities was their geographical location within the UK, or within and between local areas (see Chapter 4), with our research taking part in Greater Manchester and London. Thus the Polish community in Manchester has a long established presence, network and infrastructure (a similar situation is found among the Gujerati sample), while the Bangladeshi communities in Oldham and Rochdale have a highly localised concentration, which has been adversely affected by a long process of deindustrialisation and social marginalisation. The Kurdish community is concentrated mainly in London, despite attempts at dispersal, but does not comprise a settled local community. The differences, even within settled minority ethnic groups, were made apparent by our two Chinese sample groups – sited in East London and South East London, the former with an established sense of locally based community and services, and the latter comprising a loose network centred on a Chinese church.

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted from each community, by community researchers in the appropriate first language/dialect. Six researchers conducted the research interviews (two Chinese researchers and one for each of the other groups) (see Table 1).

The researchers were asked to access a range of people to interview who demonstrated the variety of experiences and needs within each community, for example, around gender (see Figure 1), age (see Figure 2), family background and migration history. In selecting people to interview, we did not aim to produce a demographically representative sample, but, rather, illustrative depth of the range and kinds of experiences of people who need and use interpreters. This revealed significant differences in the profile and interpreting needs of each group. For

Table 1 Researchers, groups and languages

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<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Minority ethnic group</th>
<th>Languages used</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bogusia Temple</td>
<td>Polish (Manchester)</td>
<td>Polish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita Sam</td>
<td>Chinese (London)</td>
<td>Cantonese, Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liu Zhuang</td>
<td>Chinese (London)</td>
<td>Mandarin and dialects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usha Kanani</td>
<td>Indian (Manchester)</td>
<td>Gujerati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohib Miah</td>
<td>Bangladeshi (Manchester)</td>
<td>Sylheti, Bengali and dialects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdish researcher</td>
<td>Kurdish (London)</td>
<td>Kurdish, Iraqi, Turkish, Arabic</td>
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example, with the Gujerati and Polish samples, the length of settlement in the UK meant that the need for English-language support was restricted largely to older people. On the other hand, the Kurdish and Polish Roma groups reflected the younger age and gender profile of the predominantly younger male and newly arrived asylum seekers.

Each researcher accessed their communities through a mix of channels – their own personal networks and a range of statutory, voluntary and community sector services. Several of the researchers were members of local communities, or had work links with them; indeed, three of our researchers (Chinese, Gujerati and Kurdish) had worked as interpreters for local organisations and utilised these networks to access potential interviewees. However, we avoided recruiting our sample completely through such organisations and agencies. This was for two reasons: first, we did not want the research to be identified with a particular
organisation and their agenda. Secondly, and more importantly, we were keen to use informal networks to allow access to people who did not use such formal organisations and who, therefore, fall through the gaps of formal provision. Every participant was given £10 at the end of their interview as a ‘thank you’.

The interviews themselves encompassed a brief life history, addressing people’s lives in their country of origin, as well as their experiences in the UK. This was to enable us to place their perspectives on interpreting provision in the broader contexts of who they were as people and what they felt about themselves and their lives both prior to migration and afterwards. This was to prove very significant in terms of discussing issues around access to ‘community’ support (Chapter 4) and ‘trust’ in the interpreting process (Chapter 5). The interviews then concentrated on encouraging a ‘story-telling’ approach to instances when people required interpreters in order to gain access to various services, drawing out specific issues concerning the implications of a lack of English language competence, locating and accessing interpreters from both formal and informal sources, who and what type of interpreter and interpreting they felt best served their needs, and their self-positioning and perception of others within this relationship (Chapter 3). This part of the interview allowed us to focus down on priorities and issues for interpreting provision from service users’ perspectives.

The importance of researching lives in context: barriers to learning to speak English

As we discussed in Chapter 1, the issue of English-language usage has become an important political and policy issue in recent debates about race relations, migration and asylum policies. The primary emphasis of these debates has been on the need for new migrants, and established settlers, to learn English as part of their attainment of full citizenship status. This has shifted attention away from ‘mother tongue’ support and interpreting provision, with a clear expectation that it is incumbent on migrants to learn English. However, as our research made apparent, this is in no way as clear-cut and straightforward a task as such rhetoric suggests.

Obviously, the nature of a project concerning people who need interpreters necessitated that our sample had no, little or insufficient knowledge of written or spoken English. However, several of the people we interviewed had attempted to learn English in language classes and articulated a number of both formal and informal barriers to their success. Formal barriers to attending classes, for example, were the need to work and earn money, difficulties and expenses in travelling to classes, and lack of knowledge about where and how to access classes.
There were also a number of informal reasons why some people had not learnt English, which rose out of personal experiences, life histories and cultural expectations. Like several other women with families, Nisime, a 40-year-old Iraqi Kurdish woman, who is a mother of four children, one of whom has a learning disability, said that her family responsibilities prevented her from attending language classes. Jie Chun, a 42-year-old Chinese woman, told us that she felt she was ‘too old’ to learn a new language and her family role made it difficult for her to find the time. Mr Lai, aged 86, similarly felt that his age, combined with his poor educational background in China, meant he would not be able to learn English. Mihe, a Kurdish man, said that both he and his wife had stopped attending English classes because of his poor health. Several of the asylum seekers we interviewed also told us that they were waiting for confirmation of their right to stay before learning English:

   Just because of my situation, I cannot concentrate on learning English, because I worry about being expelled sometime. If I can settle, I must learn English carefully.
   (Di Wu, a young, Chinese, male, asylum seeker)

It is therefore clear that learning, or not learning, English is a more complex process than that which simple policy demands, beliefs about migrants’ desire or refusal to ‘integrate’ and increased language provision allow for. Rather, it is rooted in the concrete and practical context of people’s lives, experiences and feelings. Researching people’s lives in context allows for this complexity to emerge and demands a more flexible and nuanced policy response, which recognises the different and multiple ways in which individuals interact with overarching systems and services. The need for interpreting services is, of course, connected closely with language acquisition and capability, but it is clear that these two elements need to be placed as complementary to, rather than as substitutes for, each other. This is, at present, as true for settled communities as it is for the flow of new migrants to Britain and looks unlikely to change in the near future, citizenship testing notwithstanding. The challenge is to understand and respond to the ways in which people, migrants and settlers, live their lives in context, the problems they face, and the choices and adaptations they make. This research is one part of such a process. In the next chapter, we begin to elaborate this context, overviewing our findings on people’s experiences of access to services with interpreters.
Introduction

In Chapter 1, we pointed out that the research that exists on interpreting services is carried out from the service providers’ point of view. It is assumed that evidence for language-support needs is evidence of the need for professional interpreters. There is very little research on the views of people who use interpreters about what kind of resources they would like to meet their needs. Moreover, language services are provided for undifferentiated ‘communities’. For example, in relation to languages, Kurdish people may speak Kurdish, Iraqi, Turkish or Arabic, as well as other languages and dialects or combinations of these; Chinese people may speak Mandarin or Cantonese and/or a variety of dialects; while Bangladeshi people may speak Sylheti, Bengali and various dialects. Moreover, the length of time a community has been established and their particular migration history will influence the resources available to people and their decisions about when and who to use as an interpreter.

In this chapter, we examine ideals and process when using interpreters for the people we interviewed. We start by showing that the question of who needs an interpreter is not necessarily a straightforward issue. We then move on to consider the questions of what qualities people felt were important in a good interpreter and what sort of role they wanted interpreters to play. Finally, we explore the question of who acted as an interpreter for the people we interviewed, looking in detail at their experiences of accessing and using interpreters from different sources. A key feature of the discussion throughout this chapter is that language proficiency – on the part of both those who need, and those who act as, interpreters – is not the only issue to be considered.

Who needs an interpreter?

There is no simple answer to the question of who needs an interpreter: the same person can both need an interpreter and be an interpreter, depending on the circumstances. Although the people taking part in our research spoke only limited, if any, English, they made up their own minds about their level of English proficiency and whether or not the situation meant that they needed an interpreter. There is a continuum of interpreting that ranges from needing an interpreter, through being able to manage without one, to ability to act as an interpreter for others (see Figure 3).
There were people who were firmly situated at one end of the continuum. They felt that their English was very limited or non-existent and that they always needed help:

I'm unable to manage without a Bengali interpreter, I don't know any English … If I go to the hospital or the doctor's, I need interpreters. When I go to parents' evenings, I need an interpreter to tell me how my children are doing at school. I need interpreters all the time.

(Shahida Chowdury, a Bangladeshi woman)

There were other people, however, who felt that they needed help on some occasions but that they could get by for some things. Furthermore, sometimes people acted as interpreters for others even though they felt that their English was limited, as *some* help was seen as better than no help at all. Their decisions about requiring an interpreter were influenced not merely by their level of English-language proficiency but also by the circumstances in which they were accessing services, as well as changes over the life course.

Thus people could move fluidly along the continuum rather than necessarily occupying a fixed place on it. Jan Lepak provides a good example of this fluid movement according to circumstances. He was a Polish Roma asylum seeker in his late twenties and lived with his extended family. Jan felt that his limited English was good enough for him to get by on his own in everyday exchanges, but that he needed an interpreter to help him with his asylum case:

If I get an average Englishman I can cope … I can make myself understood. I wouldn't say [*my English*] was good … It's a good idea to take a professional when it's important.

In addition, Jan’s mother spoke virtually no English and so he interpreted for her. He tried to help her communicate with the pharmacist and the GP:

*If [the doctor] gives me something [for my mother] I don't know what to do with it. I go back a second time without my mother so that she doesn’t tire herself. I have to make myself understood and if I don’t it’s hard luck.*

The need for interpreters also changed over people’s life course. Some older people commented that they used to speak English well enough to manage themselves but
in old age they had forgotten the English that they had known and now needed someone to interpret for them:

Before I never used [Polish], only spoke in English … I didn’t have such a great need [for an interpreter].
(Mr Baranowski, a Polish man in his late seventies)

In turn, people could question language proficiency on the part of an interpreter as the sole consideration in their provision. We now turn to the issue of the qualities that the people we interviewed considered necessary in a good interpreter.

Who makes a good interpreter?

In talking about who made a good interpreter, people focused on the requisite qualities. In discussing these qualities, ascribed characteristics such as gender and religion, as well as the interpreter’s language proficiency, assumed less importance than the interpreter’s character and attitude. They also commented on the role that a good interpreter should play, often wanting them to be proactive.

Qualities

Although ‘matching’ interpreter and service user on ascribed characteristics has long been seen as important in interpreting provision (for example, Fuller and Toon, 1988; Karseras and Hopkins, 1987), very few of the people we interviewed felt that this was a key issue. Where they did, some women said that they preferred female interpreters for medical matters, others stated that they preferred interpreters who shared their religion (i.e. Islam), and a few felt that the interpreter’s age and maturity of experience was important. It was often Bangladeshi people who stressed such characteristics.

People were also concerned about language proficiency in terms of their own mother tongue. Bangladeshi and Gujerati people, for example, felt that service providers often were unaware of the range of different Asian languages and dialects within each language:

Our mother tongue is Gujerati so they should send someone who is Gujerati; it would be better and helpful. If they speak Hindi or Urdu then there would be difficulty with some of the words. Sometimes they send Punjabi people. If would be better if they sent a Gujerati person.
(Raj Mistry, a Gujerati man)
I think most people who do interpreting speak Dhaka dialect. This can cause problems for a Sylheti-speaking person. I think Sylheti-speaking interpreters should be provided for Sylheti people. Another example, say a person is from the Chittagong area. If you have a Sylheti-speaking interpreter then this person won’t understand the Sylheti dialect. For them, there should be someone from Chittagong doing the interpreting.
(Maroof Khan, a Bangladeshi man)

Furthermore, people often based their assessment of an interpreter’s English-language proficiency on the outcome of the situation in which they required them. If the outcome was what the person wanted, then the interpreter was competent; if the outcome was a disappointment, then, among other things, their proficiency could be in question:

I think that, when they don’t solve my claim, that maybe the interpreter didn’t explain the situation well enough, or said something bad, or he didn’t know how to interpret.
(Nisime, a Kurdish woman)

Language matching and proficiency are not always enough, however. Wider issues were highlighted by the Kurdish people we interviewed. Those who originated from Turkey often felt that an interpreter’s proficiency in Turkish did not mitigate the impact of political differences between them:

The Turkish Government didn’t allow us to be educated in Kurdish. If you were heard speaking Kurdish, they put you in prison … The school [my son now attends] said that, if we want, they can provide him with a Turkish teaching assistant, but we refused.
(Mihe, a Kurdish man)

The above example points towards the important issue of trust, or rather lack of it. Indeed, when asked about the qualities of a good interpreter, most people felt that the interpreter’s character and attitude was the primary issue. Generally, people felt that an interpreter should empathise with the people for whom they were interpreting:

It must be someone who is sympathetic to people generally. Some people are better than others at this. It doesn’t matter if their Polish is fantastic if they are cold to people.
(Mrs Polanska, a Polish woman)
In many cases, people felt that interpreters whom they did not know were unlikely to be able to empathise with their situation and so would be unlikely to interpret adequately. For them, interpretation was about not just conveying words but also arguing a case. In order to do this, both the user and the interpreter needed to know something about each other:

Some are suited [to be interpreters] but some you are better off without an interpreter … You learn what people smell of. [It’s important] what outlook on life you have, what character.
(Mr Baranowski, a Polish man)

I think that if I take someone [I know] then he or she would understand my feelings and if [the service] get someone, he or she will outline the questions and answers and will not understand everything.
(Dipon Ghosh, a Bangladeshi man)

It is interesting that the only two people who mentioned that they had used telephone interpreting services both found the process unsatisfactory because they were unable to communicate in a personal manner:

[Social services] give you an interpreter over the phone, for a very short time. So that she can just interpret and then it’s finished. The conversation is over. But to sit down and discuss things, no. So it’s very hard.
(Mrs Zalewska, a Polish woman)

To summarise, for the people who took part in our research, good interpreting is about more than language proficiency and the literal exchange of words; it is about the interpreter putting forward the user’s view of their situation. This brings us to their perceptions of the role of interpreters.

**Role**

Some people were suspicious of the idea that interpreters should do anything more than interpret exactly what they were saying and what the service provider said to them. This was mainly because of concerns about whose side interpreters were taking:
I think that a good interpreter should just make the interpretation accurately. I don’t have any other requirements. He shouldn’t make any decisions on behalf of his client without permission … If the interpreter works for his boss, it’s better that he doesn’t give any suggestions.

(Di Wu, a Chinese man)

One time the housing office didn’t pay my rent. I went to housing and they brought an interpreter. We asked them to pay my housing but they told me they didn’t pay my rent any more. So I came back and brought one of my friends. He explained my situation to them and they accepted it. This is the difference between good and bad [interpreting] as I said. I know that the interpreter didn’t interpret my words exactly. That’s why they refused me the first time … Actually I look on [an interpreter from a service provider] as a government agent. I don’t feel safe.

(Nedim, a Kurdish man)

The majority of the people interviewed, however, felt that they would like interpreters to be more proactive — a role akin to advocacy, pleading the user’s case and giving advice. They felt that interpreters should do more than pass on words, because people who needed interpreters often did not understand how health and social care,
immigration, or the courts and other official systems worked. They appreciated interpreters who had knowledge of systems as well as technical language ability:

The Chinese generation who’ve been in the country for 20 or 30 years aren’t normally educated, they have language problems. Even if they’re eligible for some welfare, they don’t know how to get it and they may not even know such welfare exists … I prefer [interpreters who think from my standpoint], they can give me ideas.
(Jie Chun, a Chinese woman)

I was very lucky with my interpreter, she has helped me a lot. She has steered me through and told me where I can go and how I can arrange things … She advises me. If I say anything wrong she tells me herself that, ‘you can’t do that Mrs Zalewska because it’s not allowed’.
(Mrs Zalewska, a Polish Roma woman)

[An interpreter] should give good advice, that’s what I believe. Giving advice is helpful, whatever the case. Clients can benefit because they don’t have knowledge of the laws and procedures.
(Bijal Patel, a Gujerati man)

However, people did not see or understand differences between various types of interpreter, such as professional interpreters, bilingual employees, interpreter-advocates, link workers and so on. Indeed, they did not always know the status of the person who had been provided as an interpreter for them when they used services, whether they were professional or not. We now turn to this and other issues in looking at people’s experiences of accessing and using services with interpreters.

Who is an interpreter?

People used individual, family and community resources to find ways to get around their limited English proficiency. They developed a range of strategies and networks to access services, including health and social care professionals who spoke their language, family and friends, community organisations and professional interpreters. Whether and to whom they turned was not only a matter of choice, but also depended on the context, who was available and the infrastructure arising from the history of establishment of the different communities. We begin, however, by looking at people’s access to and use of professional interpreters before going on to consider, in turn, bilingual professionals and staff, community organisations, and family and friends.
**Professional interpreters**

Most people felt that they had used a professional interpreter at some time, although, as we noted above, they were not always sure about this status. There was also confusion about the procedures for obtaining a professional interpreter, but, even where people did know how to go about it, they experienced difficulties. Moreover, their experiences of using professional interpreters were not always satisfactory. We discuss each of these issues in turn.

Some people were unsure about whether or not the interpreters they had been provided with when they used services were professional or not. This was particularly the case in relation to interpreters in hospitals and from community organisations. Generally, people were confused about their status, and did not seem to have been told about the position or role of the interpreter they were provided with. Indeed, sometimes they did not even know the name of the person who had interpreted for them. People sometimes assumed that bilingual staff were called in to act as interpreters (see further below):

That's illegal! [professional interpreters]. In the NHS you can't pay for help at the doctor’s or the hospital … They’re just volunteers.

(Mr Matejko, a Polish man)

I've never taken an interest, so I've never asked anyone [if they were professional]… I don’t know anything about it … The hospital asked the interpreter to come and he spoke to the doctor and interpreted for me … I didn’t notice much difference [whether he was professional or not].

(Ravi Gokul, a Gujarati man)

There was also a lack of knowledge about how to get hold of a professional interpreter. Many people said that they did not know that they could ask for a professional interpreter themselves, or that they did not know how to go about it, or even who would meet the cost:

I would have to ask around [to find out where to get a professional interpreter]. Sometimes they advertise. But you probably have to go to London.

(Sister Basia, a Polish woman)

No, I don’t know [where and how to access a professional interpreter] because I can’t read or write English.

(Farmeeda Akthar, a Bangladeshi woman)
Even where people did know how to avail themselves of professional interpreters, they could experience difficulties in access. One of these difficulties was a relatively basic hurdle – the service could not be booked unless you spoke English:

It's very difficult to access the service. For example, I couldn't communicate with the receptionist to book the interpreters. I also couldn't communicate with the telephonist to book the service. My first time using the interpreter was when I was in a hospital. They provided the interpreter for me. But I have to fill in a request form and I have difficulty in filling in the form.
(Mrs Tong, a Chinese woman)

Other difficulties were connected to the lack of reliable availability of professional interpreters:

When I went to see about the New Deal, I went to the job centre. There was no Bengali-speaking [interpreter] there, so my appointment was cancelled. I couldn't find anybody myself either for that occasion.
(Rupee Bibi, a Bangladeshi woman)

I was called for interview [about my asylum application]. My appointment was at 10.00 a.m. but by 4.00 p.m. I still wasn't called. I was asked to go back two days later because the interpreter had finished working.
(Hasan Malik, a Bangladeshi man)

We have to wait a few days to get help from interpreters. We have to wait, we can't get interpreting services straight away. We can't get the service on the same day. I get used to waiting. Sometimes we still can't get anyone when we've been waiting for a long time.
(Mr Lai, a Chinese man)

Once people have overcome any access difficulties and obtained a professional interpreter, there is the issue of their actual experiences. Some people had positive things to say about professional interpreters. As discussed above, this included their knowledge of the ways that systems work. In particular, good experiences of professional interpreters were associated with people being provided with the same interpreter over a number of occasions. They thus had got to know them personally and had established trust with them over a period of time:

We have an interpreter. At the doctor's or the solicitor's, she is our interpreter … She always helps. I have her office number and her home number. I can even phone up in the middle of the night and she will come. She never turns me away.
(Mrs Zielonska, a Polish Roma woman)
If an appointment has been made for me with the hospital then there is a Gujerati lady who is an interpreter [there]. I call her a few days before the appointment to tell her the date and time. She says, ‘when you get to the hospital, call me and tell me you are here’ … When the doctor says something, she explains everything. And other times, if I need to book an ambulance, I ring her. After she’s booked the ambulance, she rings me back. So that’s a lot of help.

(Rena Ghelani, a Gujerati woman)

Most of the people we interviewed, however, were critical of the professional interpreters who they had used. They felt that service providers controlled the provision of interpreters and that these professionals did not meet the qualities and role they believed were requisites for a good interpreter. They felt that the professional interpreters were there to represent the providers’ or their own interests, not those of users. There were also many negative comments about the proficiency and character of the professional interpreters who they had used:

When I first came to England, I had an interview with social services. Afterwards the social services sent me a letter, and my husband read it. He asked me, ‘what did you say? It says that you told social services you were working’. I said, ‘no, I told him I wanted to work’. So then my husband explained the situation to [social services], and they corrected it. I was very angry with the interpreter because, if my husband hadn’t corrected it, they would have cut my income support.

(Nisime, a Kurdish woman)

I had an interview with the Home Office six months ago, and it was my solicitor’s interpreter. He was okay. I can understand what he said [in English] actually. I must admit I wasn’t happy with the Home Office interpreter … I expected that interpreter to explain about my psychological situation but he didn’t … It all depends on an interpreter’s character, some of them I don’t trust because of their attitude.

(Dersim, a Kurdish man)

When they were asked in what situations they felt that using a professional interpreter would be particularly useful, most people felt that their preference was for family and friends. Some, however, did recognise the value of a professional interpreter in medical or legal matters, or particularly difficult situations involving official systems:
Professional interpreters should be there for any complicated situations, if it’s necessary.
(Ravi Gokul, a Gujerati man)

My father-in-law started to get very angry with me and encouraged my husband to beat me ... My father-in-law told me I could go, they just wanted to keep my child. They said I’m not a member of their family ... I reported this to the police ... The policeman came very late. They asked my husband [who speaks English, to interpret] what I’d said ... I was very angry ... I walked out of the house with my son. When I was putting my son down on the doorstep to get my jacket, my father-in-law shouted to the officer that I abuse my son. But the police officer ignored him ... The next day, my father-in-law made a complaint to the social services and claimed that I abused my son. After a while, a social worker brought an interpreter to make a home visit to me ... So, in this case, an interpreting service is very important.
(Heidi, a Chinese woman)

**Bilingual professionals and staff**

Using bilingual professionals is, in fact, a common alternative to using an interpreter. The spread and availability of such resources in the different communities is related to each community’s history of establishment and the extent of people’s own integration into that community. The people we interviewed described how they used a range of professionals who spoke their mother tongue. For the most part, this strategy was seen as beneficial because it allowed them to access services that would otherwise have presented them with communication barriers. A few, however, were ambivalent about using bilingual professionals:

Polish people are everywhere. There are Polish shops, dentists, doctors, staff in hospitals, solicitors. I know where they all are ... It’s good that they know what I want because they know me and they know what I can do and how I live ... *[The downside to this is the same]*, they know me and they know how I live!
(Mr Matejko, a Polish man)

In terms of interpreting, however, the people we interviewed sometimes had experience of bilingual staff who were based at a service they were using being called on to act as interpreters:

In the hospital we can always find someone who speaks Gujerati and English, and is willing to help out.
(Suraj Gangani, a Gujerati man)
Access to services with interpreters

As we noted earlier, people could be unsure about whether the person who was interpreting for them was a professional interpreter or a bilingual staff member. Where they felt that they were aware of bilingual staff acting as interpreters, however, some believed that there were inherent drawbacks:

Those who work [at the hospital] aren’t likely to be on your side in an argument so you’re better off taking someone with you.
(Mr Matejko, a Polish man)

When people did ‘take someone with them’ to act as an interpreter, they could draw on community organisations.

**Community organisations**

The infrastructure of community organisations available to people, as with bilingual professionals, was related to the migration history of the particular minority ethnic group. The interpreting services these organisations provided ranged from the more formalised provision of professional interpreters, such as the Bangladeshi Association and some Chinese centres, to volunteers providing interpreting and other services on the basis of goodwill or for status, such as the Polish Club and some of the Kurdish community centres. As we noted earlier, however, the people we interviewed largely did not distinguish between such professional and untrained interpreting provision.

People could have similarly ambivalent feelings about community organisations as they did bilingual professionals: many appreciated them as a resource and a source of belonging and companionship, but some also had reservations, or were marginalised by such organisations:

I’m not sure [about getting an interpreter from the Polish Club]. They seem to talk about everyone’s business openly. I wouldn’t like everyone to know about my life … It might be better to have someone from outside.
(Mrs Polanska, a Polish woman)

The Chinese community centre is very important to me … I’m a volunteer there, I cook for the luncheon club … [When I was ill] the doctor expected me to bring an interpreter … I found one through the Chinese community centre, but she didn’t turn up in the end. I made an appointment with her in advance but she didn’t turn up. I felt very frustrated. And the doctor sent me away … The interpreter works on a part-time basis, such as Monday, Wednesday and
Thursday, but I’d like to get an interpreter for other days. It’s very difficult to arrange a mutual time … Another experience is that the interpreter refused my booking because she explained that I can speak a little bit of English and she had other people who can’t speak any.

(Amy, a Chinese woman)

Community organisations seemed to fall between professional interpreters, and family and friends acting as interpreters in terms of accessibility and trust for most of the people we interviewed – indeed, notions of community and family and friends could overlap.

**Family and friends**

All the people we interviewed who had family and friends available had used them as interpreters to enable access and use of mainstream services. The main reasons for this were issues of trust and not wanting ‘strangers’ to know their problems, as well as a history of shared understandings and obligations. A number of practical
advantages were also pointed to: family and friends were often readily accessible, could help with everyday matters and with transport, and did not require payment:

I’ve heard of [interpreting services] but I never use them … I ask my friend first. Because we both come from China, her thought and language are the same, so I find this suits me better … [I also use my friend] because I don’t have to wait! The disadvantage is that her English isn’t very good. (Shirley, a Chinese woman)

If I need to take someone [my friend] goes with me. He doesn’t charge me any money … [And] if I need [an interpreter] for a hospital appointment, my son-in-law goes with me and, if I need to fill in a form, he does that for me … He does it for me because I live on my own and also he’s my son-in-law. He has a car and he takes me by car and brings me back … I prefer to take someone with me who I know, it’s better for me. (Reshma Begum, a Bangladeshi woman)

Some people, however, did not have family or friends readily available, and so had to turn to other sources of interpreting even though they would have preferred to use their own networks:

There’s no one in this area nearby [to help me with interpreting] … Both my children are far away and there’s no close family nearby. When necessary, I use hospital interpreters because they’re there. It would be better if [my children] could come but they live too far away. Also, they’re busy with their work so they can’t always come … I have no one from my family who’s free and nearby, otherwise I’d choose to take them with me. (Ravi Gokul, a Gujerati man)

Those who did have family and friends available to them, however, sometimes recognised drawbacks to using these people as interpreters. These centred mainly on practical issues, such as members of their informal networks having only a slightly greater language proficiency than themselves (and we have already noted how the people we interviewed could act as interpreters for others with even more limited English than themselves) and a lack of knowledge of official systems and terminology, or the people they called on having other commitments:

I ask my friends if they will let their daughters go with me [to interpret]. It’s whoever I can find … I have a son in Bangladesh who I applied to bring here [to the UK] … [But] I have lost everything. The things I said [at the immigration hearing] did not get translated properly. This is why everything is messed up. (Rima Khanom, a Bangladeshi woman)
Any situation where I need an interpreter, I ask my son ... The advantage is that, whatever we ask him to do, he tries his best. But, because he’s very busy, we don’t disturb him often because we don’t want his wife to complain that we take up too much of his time.
(Jie Xin, a Chinese woman)

There were also, for a few, other drawbacks such as embarrassment and privacy concerns about sharing their troubles with family and friends, again raising issues of trust:

My husband [normally does my interpreting for me], but his English isn’t very good. The advantage is that he advises me and knows the system and I feel safe. But the disadvantage is that, because he’s the one dealing with everything all the time, I feel like I don’t know anything.
(Mehtab, a Kurdish woman)

I had something to do at the solicitor’s so I took my uncle with me. He interpreted, but I have some regrets because I’m afraid that, if he doesn’t keep it secret, it will cause me a lot of problems.
(Hasret, a Kurdish man)

Generally, however, the majority of the people we interviewed preferred drawing on their informal networks of family and friends to act as interpreters for them in all except important legal and medical matters.

**Concluding summary: key issues in using interpreters**

This chapter has provided an overview of the broad contours of people’s access to services with interpreters. We have looked at both what interpreting provision they feel to be ideal and the processes associated with their actual experiences of a range of interpreting resources. We have seen that language proficiency – on the part of both those who need, and those who act as, interpreters – is not the only consideration. Key issues are as follows.

- People make their own decisions about whether or not they need an interpreter and who is best placed to act as an interpreter for them. This depends not only on their level of English-language proficiency, but also on the particular circumstances in which they are accessing services.
Access to services with interpreters

- The interpreter’s character and attitude are important. An interpreter needs empathy, and this is enhanced where interpreter and user know something about each other. In addition, people often want an interpreter to be proactive, pleading the user’s case and giving advice about systems and procedures.

- There is general confusion about professional interpreting provision. People are not sure of the status of interpreters who are provided for them when they use services. They either do not know how to access professional interpreters themselves, or experience difficulties in the access procedures.

- Professional interpreters can be appreciated for their knowledge of legal and medical systems and procedures especially, and people can establish trust with professional interpreters who are provided for them over a number of occasions. For the most part, however, people’s experiences of professional interpreters are negative, calling into question their language proficiency and character.

- People can be ambivalent about using both bilingual professionals and community organisations. Each is appreciated as a resource and source of interpreting, but there are some reservations about their reliability.

- People use family and friends, rather than strangers, as interpreters because they trust them, and have a history of shared understandings and obligations, as well as practical advantages such as ready availability. They do recognise drawbacks, however, especially these people’s lack of knowledge of official procedures and terminology.

Underlying these key features of people’s access to services with interpreters are broader understandings about the nature of community, friends and family, and trust. One of the aims of this research is to place users’ experiences with interpreters in the biographical and cultural context of their lives as a whole. Such a placing is necessary in order to understand the reasons why the people we interviewed considered and experienced particular sorts of interpreting resource as better than others, notably their preference for family and friends over professional interpreters. Accordingly, in the next two chapters, we devote in-depth attention to these underlying biographical and cultural issues, looking at the meanings of community, friends and family in Chapter 4 and exploring in detail the nature of trust in Chapter 5.
Introduction

Community organisations, resources and networks are a crucial source of help and support for those needing to access interpreting services. Indeed, provision of interpreting services, as with other welfare provisions, is often premised on the existence of distinct and clearly defined ethnic and cultural groups with particular characteristics and needs. However, it is clear that the availability and reliability of community services vary widely between ethnic groups. The extent and success of community provision seems particularly dependent on how long ethnic groups have been present in the UK, and patterns of settlement (for example, how large a particular group is within a specific locale, and the historical and structural factors affecting different areas), but it is also affected by the forms of access that individuals have to these services. The notion of ‘community’ tends to emphasise homogeneity within groups and assumes clearly defined cultural and geographical boundaries. This approach ignores internal variations that may affect access to, and use of, services, such as those around age, class and gender, but also around issues of language, internal structures of marginalisation and private feelings of trust/distrust. It also renders invisible the ways in which people create their own personal ideas of ‘community’ in different ways – through the use of social networks, as family or as part of friendship groups.

This chapter will explore some of the contours of ‘community’ and its significance in facilitating or hindering access to interpreting services. The analysis of ‘community’ will take place at two levels: first, the role of formal ideas of ‘community’ in providing an institutional framework for accessing services; and, second, the informal, more complex and fluid ways in which ‘community’ is constructed by the people we interviewed. This latter view of ‘community’ will consider its intersection with family, friends and social networks, and will focus on similarities and differences within and between ethnic groups.

Institutional ‘community’: the presence of formal services

As discussed in Chapter 2, the different groups we selected for the research varied widely in terms of length of presence in the United Kingdom, migration histories and local characteristics. This, hardly surprisingly, affected the amount and variety of formal community resources that were available to individuals within those communities.

It is worth noting that the profile of each of these ethnic groups, around age, levels of employment, education, housing and legal status, impacted greatly on their interaction with mainstream institutions, such as social services, immigration services, schools, employment bureaux, health providers and so on. Any discussion
of minority ethnic ‘communities’ and community provision must then be placed in relation to their position within a broader context of majority ‘community’ services. Ethnic groups do not function as autonomous ‘ethnic bubbles’ (Gates, 1992), but are embedded in wider relationships of power, in which language facility can be a major stumbling block. Minority ethnic ‘community’ organisations thus function as important cultural and linguistic intermediaries.

The problems with language and interpreting facilities in accessing mainstream services were stressed particularly by the Kurdish, Polish Roma and Bangladeshi groups, who felt strongly that their position was weakened by inadequate provision. A number suggested that their access to full welfare provision, and dealing with immigration issues, was severely and adversely affected by lack of adequate interpreting. The Gujerati and older Polish people we interviewed, however, seemed satisfied with the level of language provision made for them. In both cases, this seemed to be linked to the longer establishment of community services and the availability of younger family members who were able to speak fluent English. Mr Matejko thus commented that ‘Polish people are everywhere’, and that he knew of Polish shops, doctors, dentists, solicitors and so on, while several of the Chinese sample seemed to prioritise finding Chinese-language facilities, even if this meant paying.

Each of the groups stressed the importance of formal ‘community’ services, although these institutional manifestations of ‘community’ varied across groups and in terms of kinds of usage. Among the Gujerati sample, for example, the Hindu temple was held by most people to be a central part of their everyday lives, providing a social, cultural and religious role, as well as offering language classes, health education sessions and language support. The longer established Polish community also placed great importance on the Polish church, and on the Polish Club and the Combatants’ Association, which offered some interpreting services and support. By contrast, the Polish Roma sample had little contact with these central institutions. The Chinese sample also mentioned the Chinese church as a source of support. Interestingly, neither the Kurdish nor the Bangladeshi groups placed much importance on religious institutions, and mainly utilised local community centres for advice and language support.

Each of the five sample groups used local community centres. These offered a range of services, including language support in terms of interpreting services and English-language classes. However, the Kurdish sample emphasised difficulties in accessing community services because of problems of distance and travelling expense, as well as expressing concerns about possible political allegiances of such organisations and a resulting distrust. Others pointed to concerns over marginality (Polish Roma),
confidentiality and trust that affected their use of these services. Other formal 'community'-based institutions mentioned were: Saturday schools (Polish), Mosque schools (Bangladeshi), parish halls (Polish), care homes (Polish and Chinese), senior citizens' centres (Gujerati), Indian associations (Gujerati), travel agencies (Chinese), health centres (Chinese), employment agencies (Chinese) and lunch clubs (Polish and Chinese). It is interesting to reflect that, in some cases, 'community' organisations are as valued for transmitting cultural values and competencies of the minority group as they are for facilitating access to mainstream institutions.

Creating personal communities

As mentioned earlier, the notion of 'community' implies internal homogeneity and clearly recognised and demarcated boundaries. The formal institutions of 'community' serve a dual purpose — looking inwards to service its members and providing a bridge to the broader society outside of these boundaries. However, two things are clear from the previous discussion: first, that the formal dimensions of
‘community’ vary widely in form and function within and between minority groups; and, second, that members of a particular group have very differing ideas of how ‘community’ is constituted and what their needs and expectations of ‘community services’ are. This section will explore some of the different ways in which ‘community’ is recreated on a personal level and consider the implications of this for access to services using interpreters. It argues broadly that individuals tend to define ‘community’ in very personal terms and that it is this more intimate version of ‘community’ that provides networks that mediate access to services. This also helps to map out some of the pathways for the establishment of trust that form the focus of the following chapter.

Across and within the groups, differing accounts of ‘community’ were offered according to the individual person. Although the symbol of ‘community’ is then a powerful and affective one – and this emerged strongly across the groups in the interviews – it is perhaps best understood as a network of alliances, which may be situational and temporary in form. Importantly, these personal communities may bear only tangential reference to the institutional dimensions of ‘community’ outlined above. This is particularly important when looking at who provides language support. The following section will explore some of the ways in which ‘community’ was imagined.

‘Community’ as culture

The notion of minority ethnic ‘communities’ is founded primarily on the notion of shared culture, traditions and values (Parekh, 2000) and a number of the people we interviewed saw ‘community’ in these terms:

It looks better for people who have the same culture to live together.  
(Shahida Chowdury, a Bangladeshi woman)

I get the chance to meet people and that fills my heart with joy.  
(Tejus Solanki, a Gujarati man)

As mentioned earlier, several people placed a great deal of emphasis on the need to maintain and transmit cultural traditions across the generations through community contact. For example, Mrs Topolska spoke of her concerns that her daughter would forget how to speak Polish and her desire to send her to Polish Saturday school. However, several others in the Polish group noted that many Saturday schools had closed because of a lack of funding and of interest from young people.
'Community' in this abstract sense was not always viewed as a positive element. This was often centred on ideas of trust:

Here everyone is deceiving, everyone is too smart, nobody gives any respect. (Shyamal Kotecha, a Gujerati man)

'Community' and difference

Despite the assertion of a common cultural identity, a recurrent feature across the groups was the way in which 'community' or ethnic labels ignored important internal differences, particularly around language and dialect. For example, the 'Chinese' sample was a mix of Cantonese- and Mandarin-speaking people, but there are also smaller language/ethnic groups present in the UK. There is also a division between mainland Chinese and people from Hong Kong or Vietnam. Similarly, the largest proportion of Bangladeshis in Britain is Sylheti speaking: this not only excludes other dialects/regions, but also means that most Sylhetis do not understand standard Bengali. Several of the people we interviewed mentioned problems with understanding Bengali interpreters who had been provided for them, as well as other 'Asian' interpreters who were Hindi or Urdu speakers. This was an issue repeated in the Gujerati group, although some claimed to be able to understand Hindi and Punjabi interpreters. However, this was felt to be an unsatisfactory compromise. With both groups, language differences also correlate to specificities of region, religion and caste. Among the Kurdish groups, differences were mentioned between Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi Kurds, each with their own languages (in addition to, or instead of Kurdish), and between Kurdish and non-Kurdish national groups (for example, Turkish communities). The Polish sample was divided between ethnic Polish people (with some regional variations) and the Polish Roma community, which has its own language (although most Polish Roma can also speak Polish). It is significant, though, that notions of caste, region or dialect also form part of a discourse of similarity and difference that can be used to recreate a notion of shared identity vis-à-vis apparently similar 'others'. These similarities and differences complicate any clear designation of racial, ethnic or cultural identity, particularly where language is assumed to be a defining factor.

'Community' as place

While the notion of cultural/ethnic 'community' was a common theme, it is also true that this very abstracted notion was often articulated in more concrete and local terms – i.e. focusing on cultural 'community' within a particular space. Among the Bangladeshi group, for example, the people we interviewed often drew attention to the presence of large numbers of Bangladeshis locally and the availability of
specific services – shops, mosques, community centres – as a primary definition of ‘community’. This definition was found similarly with the Chinese East London sample, and it is significant that two people, from outside this locale, stressed their sense of isolation from their ‘community’. The Chinese South London sample, in the absence of a large number of Chinese people locally, tended to focus their sense of ‘community’ on the local Chinese church, although several pointed to Chinatown as a focal point for ‘the Chinese community’, and for access to services. The Gujeratis, who likewise lived in very ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, pointed to the significance of the Hindu temple in defining their sense of a community as part of a local network. The Polish sample similarly drew on the idea of ‘community’ as a network, with the Church and community services as central symbols, though access to these institutions varied greatly between the Polish and Polish Roma groups. By way of a significant contrast, the Kurdish group had a very dispersed and abstracted notion of ‘community’, which was not linked to either place or institutions, but relied almost completely on very fluid networks of friends and family.

Tweedle Street Mosque, Rochdale
‘Community’ as family

The notion of ‘ethnic group’ is often defined through not only shared history and culture, but also ideas of kinship and family (Parekh, 2000). Ideas of ethnic ‘community’ are similarly often constructed in pseudo-familial terms, and this notion is particularly important in policy formation in assuming that ‘the community’ will take on responsibility for provision of care and support (for example, of older and disabled people) for all its members equally. A number of the people we interviewed stressed the importance of ‘community’ in terms of support and care, particularly in assisting with the initial arrival of migrants and in times of hardship:

We had a small group of people. We lived like brothers. We helped each other, we fed each other if someone had no money. When new people came, people gave shelter. Everyone was helpful and supportive.
(Hasan Malik, a Bangladeshi man)

The use of familial labels, e.g. ‘brothers’, was also found within the Chinese South London group, who referred to their church community in familial terms, as ‘brothers and sisters’, while Sister Basia, a Polish nun, also articulated her sense of community, locally and globally, in terms of a church sisterhood. Labels of such ‘fictive kinship’ suggest a degree of familiarity and trust that is of significance in defining who people will rely on for support.

However, while some people articulated the notion of ‘community’ as family, it was more usual for family to mark the boundaries of ‘community’, i.e. that the networks that many of our sample relied on were strongly (and sometimes exclusively) family focused and delineated. Several people stressed the importance of family in establishing contacts during arrival. Zomir Uddin, a Bangladeshi man in his mid-fifties, who arrived in Britain in 1968, also noted that the notion of ‘community’ was transformed by the arrival of families, and had changed its needs:

Now people have families, people need housing, hospital and doctors. They need everything.

Each of the five groups stressed the importance of family to the mapping of their personal communities, although, in the Kurdish and Polish Roma cases, this was undermined by the very dispersed nature of the recent migration. This was particularly the case among women, who, in many cases, relied on family support for social networks, interpreting and other support. Anna Stopinska, a Polish woman, claimed that she was able to rely on her husband for support, because he had been settled for longer than her in the UK and spoke better English. Similarly, a number of
the Bangladeshi women who were interviewed relied on immediate and extended family networks, and this was also the case with Polish, Kurdish and Chinese groups.

This family support was not gender-specific, however. Thus, Hasan Malik said he relied on his uncle and cousins for support on his arrival in the UK, and that his uncle in turn relied on his wife who had been in the UK for some time. Length of settlement must then also be taken into account. Other people talked about the importance of family in a cross-generational sense: the Gujarati and Polish groups thus laid emphasis on the importance of their children and grandchildren in their lives, and in relation to providing reliable and accessible interpreters.

Family was not always articulated in positive ways, however. A number of women across the groups, noted that, while family was a source of support and strength, it could also be a great constraint on their lives and opportunities, particularly for those with small children. This put them into situations where they had to deal with mainstream institutions, such as schools and hospitals, but were also prevented from having the time to learn English. For example, Nisime, a 40-year-old Iraqi woman with four children (one with a learning disability), said that childcare took up her whole day so she had not been able to establish links with the Kurdish community, nor been able to attend language classes.

Reliance on family support can prove problematic if those links are challenged, through divorce, domestic conflict or death. Even where family links are strong, it is not always appropriate or convenient to rely on family members who may have other obligations. A number of the Gujarati and Polish people we interviewed, for example, told the researcher that they relied on their children for support, but their children often lived a great distance away, and had other family or work commitments. Kavita Thakkar, a 65-year-old Gujarati widow, said that both she and her children considered it a family duty to offer support – ‘my family say to me “why do you need someone else to take you when we are able to take you?”’ – but that this caused her some frustration:

If someone can teach us English we can do a lot of things without frustration … They always say, ‘Why? We are here for you.’ So I don’t tell anyone.

The intersection of family and ‘community’ was also a source of personal and emotional distress, caused by the separation of migration. This was articulated primarily by the more recent arrivals – particularly the Polish Roma, the Kurdish and the Bangladeshi groups – though it was also a recurrent theme among some of the older Polish men. Jan Lepak, a Polish Roma man, who arrived in the UK very
recently, talked of the need to keep his family together, to give support to each other and to protect each other. Similarly, a number of the Kurdish group mentioned family loss and separation, particularly those who had had family killed or imprisoned during the Iraqi and Turkish persecution of the Kurds. Family is then significant both as a presence (for support) and as an absence (a symbol of what has been lost in the circumstances surrounding the search for asylum). Nisime, a Kurdish woman, thus said that she feels like she is ‘in exile’.

‘Community’ as friends

The construction of ‘community’ around networks of friends was another common theme, though this varied across groups and across gender. Women, for example, tended to focus their social networks on family links and on particular institutional contexts – friends from church or temple – which were crucial to a sense of emotional support. Mrs Topolska, for example, said that when her family first arrived in the UK, a woman friend helped them set up home, and she had friends who helped with transport, childminding, finding work and even washing clothes. Overall, however, women tended to place friendships secondary to family support.

Men tended to have more open and wider networks of friends, which were formed often in a more instrumental and temporary manner, and which can be mapped onto a broader notion of ‘community’. Thus a number of the young Kurdish men talked about the importance of help gained from ‘friends’ met in cafes, parks, on buses, at the library and so on. Shyamal Kotecha, a Gujerati man in his seventies, also spoke of approaching other Asian people in the street for phone numbers when he first arrived in Britain. This is probably connected to gendered differences in migration history and community make-up, in which early migration tends to be by young, single men, with women and families following later.

Among the different groups, the emphasis on friends varied. However, individuals from across the groups stressed the importance of sharing culture and background with their friends, and tended to have friends only from within their ethnic/language background. Although this was based partially on the belief that shared background allowed for greater understanding and closeness, and was a positive choice, several people also noted that language difficulties placed severe constraints on forming friendships from other groups, and few of the people we interviewed had English friends. This sometimes led to feelings of isolation:

I cannot speak English, I am dumb here. I feel very lonely living here.
(Jie Hua, a Chinese woman)
The Kurdish group placed considerable importance on friends, as did the Polish Roma sample. This suggests that friends are crucial in providing assistance in the period immediately after arrival (a narrative that was reflected in the Gujerati and Bangladeshi groups also), and may constitute the content of ‘community’ in the absence of family or institutional framings. The Polish Roma people we interviewed tended to have friends only from within Polish Roma networks. The Kurdish friendship networks were all of Kurdish origin, although they may have a variety of national backgrounds, and often all Kurdish acquaintances were described as ‘friends’. For this group, friends were crucial for everyday help, and for providing social and emotional support – and were seen as a substitute for family. Other people drew much clearer differences between family, friends and acquaintances.

Friendship networks were seen as particularly important as a mechanism for finding work. The Gujerati and Bangladeshi sample – male and female – had worked largely in the northern textile mills and heavy industry, before most of the factories closed down, and had relied on other Asian friends and contacts for gaining access to employment. Both the Chinese and Bangladeshi groups also made extensive use of ‘community’ networks in finding employment in the catering industry.

People from across the groups often drew on friendship networks as a source of language support. However, as was discussed in Chapter 3, this had both advantages and drawbacks.

‘Community’ and marginalisation

In addition to these personal maps, there are external barriers and internal fault lines to the notion of ‘community’, which are focused around issues of difference, hierarchy and marginalisation. These exclusions can be of two kinds: first, that in which minority communities are marginalised in relation to the dominant society; and second, in internal processes of differentiation and exclusion.

The issue of racism was one that again cut across the different groups, although it was particularly stark among the newer arrivals, especially the Polish Roma and the Kurdish groups. This was focused around two issues: first, marginalisation from mainstream services, in which language was an important factor; and second, the expression of direct hostility from English people. Krystyna Zalewska, a young Polish Roma woman, thus said her family had suffered abuse and had had their windows broken in their previous house, and her complaints to social services had been ignored partly because of lack of access to an interpreter.
Similarly, the Kurdish sample emphasised the hostility expressed towards them in London and the incidence of racial attacks on asylum seekers outside London as a source of concern. This would suggest that a strong local ‘community’ acts as a buffer from this more direct racism, and as a source of support and refuge. It is significant that, among the longer established communities – the Bangladeshi and Gujerati – direct racism was not such a common theme, though several people mentioned racism in nearby neighbourhoods. However, the issue of institutional racism was a common theme among the Bangladeshi sample, particularly from social services and the immigration service. Several of the Chinese group noted that their community was invisible in society:

Local people do not seem to pay attention to us.
(Di Wu, a Chinese man)

This invisibility, as much as the visibility of other minority communities, also raises concerns about service provision.

In addition to the marginalisation of communities vis à vis the dominant society, there were also lines of difference, hierarchy and exclusion internal to these personal communities. Differences of age and gender, as well as regional and language differences, have been discussed above, but there were also other less tangible forms of differentiation at work. The Polish Roma people we interviewed, for example, felt themselves to be marginalised from both British society and the established Polish community. One man, Jan Lepak, claimed that even the Polish church had refused his family assistance. Several of the Kurdish sample also noted their exclusion from established Turkish communities in the UK. The sense of dislocation and isolation felt by the Polish Roma and the Kurdish groups was also reflected by two Chinese asylum seekers, who felt their uncertain status marginalised them from the established Chinese community.

Concluding summary: ‘community’ and access to services

The idea of ‘community’ can be seen as central to the ways in which individuals and groups place themselves in relation to wider society, and in facilitating access to services. The identity of ‘community’ lies at the heart of liberal multiculturalist perspectives of ‘the future of multi-ethnic Britain’ – what Bhikhu Parekh has termed ‘a community of communities’ (Parekh, 2000). This version of ‘community’ assumes a clearly demarcated entity enclosing a culturally homogeneous collectivity, and it is on this basis that needs are assessed and services are provided. ‘Community’ at this formal level is embodied in the establishment of institutions of ‘community’ –
religious institutions, community centres, schools, health and law centres, and so on – and these formal dimensions are of great significance in easing the interaction between ‘community’ members and wider society.

However, these formal dimensions of ‘community’ are only one half of the story. This chapter has discussed some of the ways in which individuals live ‘community’ in different ways and how these problematise holistic notions of cultural identity. This points to a more personal version of ‘community’ in which gender, age, migration history and personality create networks – for example, around family and friends – which cut across and reformulate ‘community’. These more complex and situational versions of ‘community’ are crucial for accessing informal sources of ‘behind-the-scenes’ support, which act alongside, or as a substitute for, more formal ‘community’ services. Such networks are also important for understanding how access to formal services is affected by forms of difference around gender, age, class and external and internal structures of marginalisation.

In addition, ‘community’ has a strong affective and emotional dimension, in which individuals and groups mark out their own maps of belonging and safety. The personal imagination of ‘community’ is a crucial corollary to, and contestation of, more abstract narratives of ‘community’, and points to the significance of notions of trust, security and dependence in the establishment of relationships. It is to this that we now turn.
Introduction

Trust has emerged as a key issue in this research into user views of access to services with interpreters. Trust was important in our research assistants’ abilities to access people to interview for the research through their networks, and it was an aspect of integration or marginalisation in personal communities. In particular, trust was identified as a feature in our discussion of people’s understandings and experiences of the process and ideals in needing and using interpreters. In this chapter, therefore, we accord it some sustained and focused attention.

The issue of trust draws our attention to the quality of social relationships between people and the obligations inherent in them (Misztal, 1996), here specifically between people who need to access services and the interpreters who they require in order to do so. Trust involves belief about the way that others are likely to behave. In the case of people who need interpreters, trusting someone to act as an interpreter for them involves the belief that the person will understand and correctly translate what they say to someone else and what that third party says back to them, and will keep the information involved in the interaction private. This involves the assumption that the person acting as interpreter is both technically competent to carry out the interpretation and morally committed to the obligation to carry it out and treat it as confidential. Trust also involves an element of uncertainty, however. People who need interpreters take the risk that the person who is interpreting for them may not be able or want to undertake a correct representation of their and other people’s words, in circumstances where they may have little ability to monitor the accuracy of the interpretation. They also take the risk that private information will be made public. It is important to bear in mind that most people who need and use interpreters are in a position of relative powerlessness – in relation to both particular situations and the wider ‘host’ society – and this sense of dependence and disadvantage will be an important factor in underpinning the relationship between individuals and interpreters. People may well, therefore, trust some individuals to act as interpreters for them more than others in order to reduce uncertainty and risk, and we have noted that people generally preferred family and friends over professional interpreters.

Many analyses make a distinction between the personal and the abstract as bases for trust. Personal trust is based on confidence in familiar and stable bonds between people, most notably family and friends. Abstract trust is based on impersonal belief in the ability of an expert or institution to perform the function that they are supposed to, here in the form of professional interpreters. In this chapter, we draw on these two
types of trust to look in depth at people’s understandings of the qualities that engender trust when using interpreters. We explore, in turn, the attributes underpinning trust in family and friends, and what are seen as trustworthy features of professional interpreters. Both these types of trust can be understood only in the biographical and cultural context of people’s lives as a whole, so in this part of the chapter we draw on case studies. This approach enables us to identify choices and constraints, and to provide a rounder understanding of decision making. Indeed, the people we interviewed did not always have a choice in who acted as an interpreter for them, so we then turn to look at the strategies that they employ for managing situations where they do not trust their interpreter. Finally, we draw out some conclusions from this in-depth look at trust in interpreters. Initially, though, we want to consider whether, when it comes to interpreting provision, trust in personal relationships or abstract systems is related to a more general sense of trust in wider society.

**The context for trust**

The concept of trust has featured with growing frequency and prominence in discussions about the state of modern society, related to concerns about social order (Misztal, 1996). The Government has attempted to measure levels of trust in society and its relationship to social integration and co-operation, and civic participation, for example (Performance and Innovation Unit, 2002). There are arguments that a lack of routine trust in people generally and a sense of an unpredictable social environment result in a lack of abstract trust in experts and institutions. These feelings will be heightened in situations of social and cultural vulnerability. It is this sort of distrust that is said to lead people to see close family and friends as the only source of predictability.

Across the different minority ethnic groups participating in our research, people tended to hold different views on the trustworthiness of the society and particular communities in which they lived. These ranged along a continuum of distrust, through contingent distrust and trust based on familiarity or group membership, to a more generalised trust.

- **Distrust:**

  I haven’t anybody, no friend, no neighbour, no relation with anybody in this area ... I think there is no safety and trust at all in the world. In Iraq, Saddam took the safety and trust. England is safe, no war, but you can’t leave your children alone, there are too many problems ... There is no trust and safety, I don’t believe there is a safe place at all in the world.

  (Nisime, Kurdish woman)
I don’t keep any friends. Everyone is deceiving, everyone is too smart, nobody gives any respect … I only keep my children’s company, that’s it.
(Shyamal Kotecha, Gujarati man)

• Distrust in unfamiliar/trust in familiar people:

Trust is one thing you cannot understand by looking at people’s face. Unless you interact and communicate with a person, you cannot possibly understand them. There are people who are good and bad in society, there are good and bad people around.
(Maroof Khan, Bangladeshi man)

I don’t trust any new neighbours. Old neighbours who become our friends can be trusted but not the newcomers.
(Neha Varma, Gujarati woman)

• Distrust in other ethnic groups/trust in ethnic group members:

I don’t trust any of my neighbours because, since I came here, I tried to create friendships with them but all of them are bad and they don’t show me any respect … Sometimes I go to the Kurdish community centre and chat with my people and I feel like I was in my own country. Everyone speaks Kurdish and really I feel proud of myself and confident … I can’t mix with English speakers because they don’t respect me. When I try to say something they are laughing at me, and sometimes they even answer me with bullying.
(Nedim, Kurdish man)

The good thing about this area is that it’s peaceful here. There is no fear here. I am a woman living with two children. It’s a calm environment … You can talk to people with trust and mix with people with trust … It’s better for Bengali people to live together. It looks better for people who have the same culture to live together … In the event of a crisis it would be beneficial. This is when a Bengali would help you.
(Shahida Chowdury, Bangladeshi woman)

• General trust:

I trust my neighbours and I don’t feel unsafe in this area because I believe that [in Britain] democracy and human rights are above everything.
(Hasan, Kurdish man)
My near neighbour is white, also there are Pakistanis, and across the road there are Gujeratis. I can trust them all.
(Suraj Gangani, Gujerati man)

For the people we interviewed, however, there did not appear to be any easy relationship between a general sense of trust or distrust and tendencies towards personal or abstract bases for trust in interpreters. For example, those who felt that they could trust people generally did not stand out from others in placing more faith in professional interpreters. Nevertheless, the contingent positions on trust in particular herald both the qualities of familiarity in personal trust with interpreters and the attribution of particular characteristics to members of a group as a feature of abstract trust in professional interpreters, which we now go on to explore in more detail.

**Trust in personal qualities**

In relationships that are based on personal trust, comprising bonds such as family or friends, people are assuming that they can rely on these others’ consideration of, and commitment to, their own needs, interests and preferences. From people’s accounts of trusting family, friends and other known members of their community to act as interpreters for them, across the different ethnic groups, we can identify a number of qualities that form the basis for this trust, which we then illustrate with some case studies:

- relational status as family member or close friend
- familiarity and continuity of relationship
- depth of knowledge of each other
- emotional commitment and loyalty.

**Case 1: Neha Varma, a Gujerati woman**

Neha had lived in Britain for around 30 years, coming from India in her later teenage years to join her husband. They had two grown-up children, one of whom was disabled and required her intensive care. As we saw above, Neha generally trusted familiar people in her area, but not ‘new neighbours’. Neha could ‘speak a little [English] and manage … but for more complicated words I need someone.’ The person who she turned to first for this was her husband, followed by a friend or members of her husband’s family. She felt that, on the basis of their relational status and familiarity, she could trust these people to interpret correctly:
My friend [for example], would ask me everything first and then interpret. Then she will tell me exactly what the person says. So I can trust her. But I can’t trust a stranger, especially when I don’t know any English from A to B, they can misinterpret anything.

Neha also felt that confidentiality was not a problem if she used family or friends because of their loyalty:

I have not come across [confidentiality] as an issue because my husband is there for me [as an interpreter]… Our friends don’t betray us in such situations, as you know. If my brother-in-law or sister-in-law is there, they don’t betray me.

In some instances, however, Neha felt that she needed a professional interpreter, if a family member or friend was not available, or if the situation involved a matter with serious implications:

Only when you are scared and you think that, if I don’t understand now in this situation then something will go wrong, at that time you need a professional interpreter.

Nevertheless, she preferred that the professional interpreter should be someone who was familiar to her, and tried to establish a relationship with them if she did not know them:

A known person is better, I don’t want a total stranger … We can only trust a known person … If someone is a complete stranger, I try to understand that person. But I like someone who tells the truth and should not mix other matters. Whatever I say should not be misinterpreted.

Case 2: Di Wu, a Chinese man

Di Wu had left China in his mid-teens to come to Britain and had now been in the country for three years. He shared a house with a group of older Chinese men, who came from the same village as he did, and said that he had many friends also from his area of origin, including through his membership of a Chinese church group. He found employment through these networks and his friends acted as interpreters when he needed them, as he spoke only basic English:

We are very close friends and we always help each other when needed … My friends are good enough, they will interpret for me … During work, sometimes speaking English is unavoidable, or I may need help to buy something or solve some problem. Normally I take them out to tea in return … The advantages [of
using friends as interpreters] is that my friends will treat me sincerely and they will always tell me the truth and provide good suggestions.

While Wu preferred to rely on his friends as interpreters because of their emotional commitment and loyalty to each other, he had some concerns about confidentiality:

It is hard to handle the situation when I need to talk about private matters. I am shy about talking about private matters in front of my friends.

He also acknowledged that, for some occasions such as legal matters, his friends did not have the requisite knowledge, and professional interpreters were necessary:

On the occasion of applying for identification, [my friends'] knowledge is not good enough to make things clear, so I have to pay professional interpreters … When I go to the Home Office, I need lawyers to help me to get identification. Then I need interpreters since the lawyers are all British. The interpreters work for the lawyer’s office.

Wu had not, however, found such professional interpreters to be as satisfactory as his friends because they lacked commitment to him as a person:

They give me a one-sentence interpretation and it’s usually hard to understand. They don’t care whether you understand what they say. Even if I ask them, they won’t repeat something or give me any further explanation … I still prefer friends … Professional interpreters have too many clients each day, they do not have the time and energy to please everyone.

Case 3: Dipon Ghosh, a Bangladeshi man

Dipon had lived in Britain for around 40 years, since he came from Bangladesh in his mid-teens. He had brought his wife and daughter over from Bangladesh and, although he still felt strong emotional links with his family of origin, regarded himself as settled in Britain and in his local community. He generally trusted people in his area, and felt ‘comfortable’. Dipon spoke only ‘basic’ English and relied mainly on his friends, who had previously been his source of finding employment, to act as interpreters for him. He felt that an interpreter was someone who had bilingual ability:

[They] must understand what I am saying and explain my explanation. This is my opinion. There is no need to have a preference about whether it is a man or a woman or to look at their religion. It should be whoever understands and is capable of doing it.
Dipon acknowledged that service providers ‘select capable people’ as interpreters. But, for him, his friends offered him more than linguistic skill. When his friends interpreted, he trusted them based on their depth of understanding of him as a person, arising out of familiarity with each other and the continuity of their relationship:

It helps me a lot and it gives me confidence … I think if I take [a friend] then he or she will understand my feelings, and if [a service] gets someone he or she will outline the questions and answers and will not understand everything.

Nevertheless, Dipon did value the confidentiality that would be provided by using a professional interpreter: ‘I can’t say everything to my friends, if something is private and very personal’.

These three case studies of personal trust in interpreters have illustrated the most common qualities associated with people’s preference for family and friends as interpreters, across all the ethnic groups represented in our research. They show how personal trust is rooted in their concrete circumstances and experiences because they are based on qualities such as familiarity and emotional connections. We have also seen, however, that these case studies raise some concerns about the risks of competence and confidentiality involved in using family and friends as interpreters. These are qualities that can be part of abstract trust, as we now explore.

Trust in abstract qualities

Abstract trust is called on when a person is not familiar with another party but is reliant on them for their knowledge and competence. It is based on expectations that a representative or member of a given group will conventionally act according to particular principles, duties and requirements (rather than their own personal interests), which are laid down in codes and training for professional groups. People identified several qualities they expected of people who are professional interpreters that would form a basis for trust, which we again illustrate with some case studies:

- adherence to codes of good practice, including confidentiality
- skill and expertise, including bilingual competence and exactness, knowledge of systems and jargon
- lack of bias (in the sense of holding no hidden personal or institutional agenda).
Case 1: Mrs Topolska, a Polish woman

Mrs Topolska had been living in Britain for about three years. She had come with her husband and three young children, but her husband had recently moved out of the household and she felt that particular people from the local Polish church and club were supporting her through a difficult time. Mrs Topolska worked with English people in a job found through her Polish networks, but said that her ability to understand and speak English was limited. She had called on Polish friends who spoke good English and who were happy to help her out with interpretation. Nevertheless, perhaps because of her personal situation, Mrs Topolska was very concerned about confidentiality in trusting someone to interpret for her and, in this respect, she said she preferred a professional interpreter who was not a member of her local Polish community. She also felt that the quality of objectivity in a professional interpreter was important:

There are people who only interpret so that they can gossip about people, but there are people who want to help ... I know what people at the Polish Club are like. I know from day to day who I can ask and who I can't. I know that. I stay away from those people ... I think that on a day-to-day basis it is better that the interpreter should not be someone you know. No one you know, so that they can be objective, so that he can interpret. So, if it was someone I knew, she would interpret everything from my point of view. It is better to use someone you don't depend on, who is neutral, and that he interprets honestly. So that he did not take sides. I think on a day-to-day basis that the Polish interpreter should start from zero, so that we did not know him ... All my friends will always take my side, and it has to be someone objective who sees you for the first time. She would come and interpret and then say goodbye.

Mrs Topolska did know a professional interpreter who she had used over several years, and who she trusted, but she believed – somewhat wistfully, it seems – that this familiarity could compromise the interpreter's professional status in her particular circumstances:

The interpreter, who was with us all the time, knew me and my husband very well, even to the extent that we became friendly. So, when I mentioned I had these problems, marriage problems, I mentioned it to her. I don’t think she would want to take sides. I know she likes me. She likes my husband. She does not want to get involved in this. I know she could because she is registered everywhere ... She wants to remain neutral and not take sides. She said she was too close to us ... I trust her and never came across a situation where I did not. She knew everything. She never said anything she shouldn’t have and she is an honest kind of woman.
Case 2: Maroof Khan, a Bangladeshi man

Maroof had arrived from Bangladesh about seven years ago to join his wife, but they were now divorced and he lived apart from her and their daughter. As we saw earlier in this chapter, he generally felt that he could establish trust only after he had got to know someone. Maroof used his networks within the local Bangladeshi community to find employment, but felt that he spoke enough English to get by: ‘I can speak but sometimes I struggle’. Maroof said that all his friends spoke English, but he felt that he needed an experienced and knowledgeable interpreter when he was dealing with official systems:

Friends don’t have knowledge about interpreting. If I need to go to social security, courts, I can take a family member who will understand English, or maybe I can manage myself, but sometimes I need help. So, I need to look for a person who understands the technical terms in interpreting. A normal person will not understand some technical language or phrase. A professional interpreter who works as an interpreter will know and understand better.

An interpreter needed to have the necessary skills, including speaking a matching dialect to the person they were interpreting for, and should adhere to the discipline of their profession, putting their own interests aside:

Someone who can take responsibility. Say, for instance, if someone does not understand something, the interpreter should explain so that the other person understands. An interpreter needs to have good listening skills so that he or she is not mistranslating anything said by either person. Therefore, an interpreter needs to have some knowledge and also has to be a competent person who can carry out their responsibility. Say, some people like to see others succeed and want to help them to succeed and will do everything to help. And there are others who are the opposite and don’t like to see others succeed. [An interpreter] should think that this person is in trouble, I should help to the best of my ability.

Maroof, however, also felt that he and the interpreter needed to know each other for him to trust that the person concerned would put his interests first:

Without knowing [each other], how could he do my interpreting? If I have a problem, he will help to solve the problem. I have trust in him, that he will help me.
**Case 3: Jie Chun, a Chinese woman**

Chun had lived in Britain for around 20 years, arriving as a young woman to join her husband, and lived with him and their three adult children. She had spent her childhood years in China, before moving to Hong Kong. Chun spoke very little English, and found employment and access to facilities within the Chinese community. She relied on being able to access Chinese-speaking health service personnel:

Someone told me that there is a Chinese doctor in the GP surgery, so I could go and register with him ... He speaks Chinese, but he is Malaysian. There are some Chinese, they're Chinese looking but they can't speak Chinese. Once I went to a hospital, a Chinese doctor talked to me. I told him 'no English', but he couldn't speak Chinese either! ... Now there are many Chinese staff in the hospital. Sometimes I ask a nurse to interpret for me, they are all from Malaysia.

Failing this, Chun sometimes had to rely on her friends or her daughter to act as interpreters for her. She trusted them personally, but not their skill and expertise, so she preferred a professional interpreter:

*My friends and daughter* do not know how to interpret some medical words since they do not study medicine. Because of this, I always ask my family doctor to ask for the interpretation service for me and, when I go to the hospital, the interpreter can do the job for me. The interpreter is more professional. Their language ability is better. I prefer these professional interpreters.

The main drawback to professional interpreters, though, was that she was unable to establish a continuous relationship with them, involving depth of knowledge, and this had an impact on her trust:

The interpreters are normally very busy and I do not have many chances to chat with them. Normally an interpreter can only work an hour for each appointment. If the time is up, they will rush to the next appointment. I have never had a chat with them. They are normally late for the appointment because they need to take a bus or other transportation ... I am telling you one thing. I have been to hospital many times but the interpreter is a different person every time. They do not know my situation, they do not know what disease I have. Even if I met an interpreter who I had met before, they would not remember me. The reason is that they go to different hospitals every day and work for many people, they cannot remember each individual. I've been to hospital more than ten times and there is only one interpreter who has worked for me twice. So it is impossible to
make them friends … I have to trust the interpreter \textit{when I don’t know them}, there is nothing I can do.

These case studies concerning abstract trust have illustrated the way that people could draw on expectations that a professional interpreter would act in a trustworthy way, exercising their skill and expertise in a fitting and confidential manner, because of the standards of conduct associated with their role. Yet, we have seen that they also wanted elements of personal trust to be involved, notably familiarity, in order to alleviate their sense of the risk they were taking in relying on a professional interpreter to fulfil their obligations. They could adopt particular strategies for managing any distrust they might feel.

\textbf{Strategies for managing distrust in interpreters}

As several people pointed out, whatever their preferences about who should act as interpreter for them, they were often faced with no choice but to trust unknown people who were either available to, or provided for, them:

As my children live far away, I have to accept whoever is available from outside. (Ravi Gokul, Gujerati man)

Turkish people, to me they are Turks and even here I can’t trust them. They don’t like Kurdish people everywhere and they don’t want Kurdish people to live in England. Sometimes when services provide an interpreter for me, if he is Turkish not Kurdish I feel that he doesn’t interpret everything that I’ve said to him. But I don’t have Kurdish friends who can come and interpret for me, so what can I do? (Tuncer, Kurdish man originating from Turkey)

Accounts of negative experiences of professional and other service-based interpreters were not unusual in this research. The people we interviewed had a number of ways of managing their uncertainties about whether or not someone was trustworthy and evaluating the risk that they were taking in trusting them to act as their interpreter. One woman called on accountability to a higher authority:

I don’t understand what they say in English. I refer them to God if they deceive me. (Nisime, Kurdish woman)

For the most part, though, people attempted to monitor the situation using evaluation of qualities that respectively form part of personal trust and abstract trust.
In terms of the qualities underlying personal trust, people attempted to assess their interpreters’ emotional and non-verbal signals as the interpretation took place:

For instance, when I speak or try to ask someone something, if the interpreter smiles at me then I feel that he doesn’t hate us, so I gain confidence. But if the interpreter looks at me badly, then I understand that he doesn’t like us.

(Tuncer, Kurdish man)

Interpretation over the telephone could cut across attempts to monitor the interpretation and assess its trustworthiness on this visual basis.

In terms of the qualities underlying abstract trust, people could attempt to draw on any limited English language skills they had to evaluate the interpreter’s expertise in this respect.

I understand a little bit of English. Sometimes the interpreters translate the wrong words from my GP.

(Amy, Chinese woman)

If they could not do this form of monitoring themselves, then the people we interviewed might enlist their family or friends, or check one interpretation against another. A good example of this is Hasret, a Kurdish man, in talking about his experiences in applying for asylum. His distrust of his interpreter during the court hearing had been aroused when he had said ‘September’ and heard it interpreted into English as ‘November’. He had corrected this misinterpretation and, from then on, suspected that the interpreter had turned against him and had not represented his situation correctly:

After I received the refusal [of my asylum application], one of my friends interpreted my verdict to me. I found many things were the opposite of what I had said. This is very important. I can tell you a tragic story and you can interpret it as a comic story … I lost my trust in [interpreters]. Now if I have a letter or something, I ask two different people to interpret it for me. Because the interpreter can finish your life if he is bad. Like me, I got refused because of the interpreter.

Hasret’s lack of trust in professional interpreters meant that he now preferred to turn to relatives and friends, rather than rely on professional interpreters, despite some misgivings about confidentiality. Hasret’s case also illustrates that people’s final judgement on whether or not their trust in their interpreter had been misplaced could be related to the substantive outcome of the situation in which they had needed one.
Concluding summary: combining personal and abstract trust

This chapter has provided an in-depth examination of the issue of trust, which emerged as a key feature in accounts of needing interpreters in order to access services, across the ethnic groups in this research. Through a consideration of the qualities associated with personal trust in particular, this examination has helped to explain why most prefer family and friends as interpreters over professional interpreters. For most of the people we interviewed, the relational status of their family and friends, their familiarity with them as part of the continuity of their relationship, the depth of knowledge that they had of each other, and their family and friends’ emotional commitment and loyalty, meant that they could trust these people to act in their best interests in carrying out the interpretation. These qualities could offset any concerns about their family and friends’ bilingual competence, especially lack of knowledge of jargon, or how systems worked, as well as any risks to confidentiality.

Professional interpreters’ role, in contrast to this, is based on abstract trust. Their obligation to adhere to good standards of practice, expert knowledge and competence, lack of personal or institutional bias and confidentiality form the basis for this trust. While people might identify these qualities, they could feel that these did not offset the uncertainty that they could feel in placing their lives in the hands of professional interpreters, whatever the strategies they might adopt to reduce risks. Feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability are an integral part of the interpreting process for many people and these feelings play a significant part in structuring the choices that people may make about interpreting provision and the sense of safety or satisfaction that results from these experiences. Again and again, the people taking part in our research referred to a quality of personal trust – familiarity – as important in bolstering their ability to place abstract trust in professional interpreters.

In essence, then, the lesson from this discussion is that personal and abstract trusts need to be combined, rather than be separate. The embodiment of trust in an interpreter is either a family member or friend who has professional skills and expertise, and adheres to professional codes of good practice, or a professional interpreter who fulfills the obligations inherent in their role and is a familiar person. We now look at the implications of this for interpreting provision in our final chapter.
6 Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction
In this final chapter of the report, we consider the implications for policy and practice arising from the findings of our research into user views of accessing and using services with interpreters. These are focused on people’s own understandings of needing interpreters, not professional views of what is appropriate. We begin by providing an overview of the findings that have emerged from our research. We then move on to look at the main qualities of and standards for good interpreting practice recommended in guidelines for professional interpreting, and to contrast these with preferences for interpreting practice among the people we interviewed for this research. We point to the need to consider people’s use of interpreters within the broader context of their lives in developing policies and providing interpreting services. This includes the issue of the nature of trust. Our policy and practice recommendations thus involve strategies for bringing together personal and abstract trust in interpreting provision.

Overview of main findings
The following are the key points from our study.

Policy and research context
• Currently, the political context of English-language use, or lack of competence in English, is at the centre of debates that involve multiculturalism. These debates range across many areas, including wider integration into society and expectations about what it is reasonable to provide in the form of help in accessing interpreting provision.

• Although the emphasis of policies is on people learning English in order to integrate into society, people who speak little or no English identify a number of obstacles. Some people could speak enough English to get by when they were younger but have lost their English competency as they grew older. Some feel too old to learn English, or are too busy trying to earn a living and support their family, or looking after the home and children (the latter especially for women). The circumstances under which some arrive in England and their lives since are so traumatic that they cannot cope with anything more than dealing with immediate issues. This is particularly the case for people seeking asylum.

• Minority ethnic groups are not homogeneous and there are many differences within them based on gender, age, migration history and language spoken, for example. This has implications for the formal and personal networks people can use and their need or desire to use interpreters from particular sources.
Conclusions and recommendations

Ideals and experiences in using interpreters

- Often people can need an interpreter in one circumstance, but themselves act as an interpreter for someone else on another occasion. In other words, they make up their minds about the level of English proficiency necessary in particular situations and who is best able to meet their needs. For example, someone can feel that they can act as an interpreter for a member of their family when they need the doctor but that they themselves want an interpreter in a legal situation.

- The understanding of who is a good interpreter is often based on the outcome of the situation in which they are needed. For example, if the person’s case for asylum is rejected, they can feel it is because the interpreter has not put their case across properly.

- A good interpreter is someone who does more than change words into another language. People often prefer proactive interpreters who can empathise with them, help with understanding systems and procedures, and plead their case.

- The social characteristics of interpreters, such as gender and religion, are generally seen as unimportant but the personal character, attitude and trustworthiness of an interpreter is seen as crucially important.

- There is a lack of knowledge about who is a professional interpreter and how to get access to one. There are often difficulties in accessing professional interpreters even for people who do know how to access them. This is because of a lack of availability, long waits or professional interpreters not turning up.

- People who use professional interpreters are often critical of them, feeling that service providers control provision and that the interpreters have an uncaring attitude or are actively against them.

Views on who to use as interpreters

- Professional interpreters can be valued for their knowledge of medical and legal systems, and people can establish trust with professional interpreters whom they get to know over a period of time.

- People are ambivalent about both bilingual professionals and community organisations. Each is seen to have advantages but there are some reservations about their reliability. In the case of community organisations, there is a lack of knowledge about the training of community representatives in interpreting and their roles in particular situations.
Access to services with interpreters

- Often people prefer family or friends to interpret. They trust them because they have an ongoing relationship with them and an emotional commitment and loyalty towards each other.

- The qualities that people value in professional interpreters, or (more accurately) that people wish that their family and friends could have, are maintaining confidentiality, bilingual competence, knowledge of service procedures and specialist language, and the lack of a hidden personal or institutional agenda.

Professional interpreting standards

The role and practice of interpreters has become professionalised. As a crucial part of this professionalisation, there is increasing stress on codes or guidelines for standards of behaviour and practice (for example, Schellekens, 2004). These guidelines differ according to the various types of interpreters: linguistic interpreters, community/cultural interpreters, interpreter-advocates, and so on. The linguistic model, for example, is simply interpreting what is said, neither adding nor taking away, and is the primary model for work in the legal field. Indeed, appeals against court judgements in cases involving interpreters are often made on the basis of transgression of this model in a particular case (Hale, 2002). In contrast, the community and advocacy models involve the interpreter intervening in a more active way and are more likely to be found in the health and social services fields, for example informing a health visitor about the cultural issues involved in a client’s situation, or redressing the situation where a social worker omits to give the client information that the interpreter thinks is relevant (Mace and Scanlon, 1998).

A key tenet across all the models, however, is that there are standards and ethics of good practice in which the interpreter needs to be trained and accredited, and which need to be followed in order to provide a professional service. A professional service is often contrasted with the problems caused by reliance on untrained interpreters such as family and friends (see Table 2).

The Institute for Linguists’ Code of Professional Conduct, for example, includes: avoiding showing religious, racial, political or sexual prejudice; honesty about linguistic and specialist competence; carrying out work with complete impartiality; fidelity to meaning and tone in interpreting; intervening only for the purposes of clarification and to correct misunderstanding; accountability for the work carried out; and a duty of complete confidentiality.

It is the provision of, and adherence to, these standards and ethics of good professional practice that form the basis for abstract trust.
Conclusions and recommendations

Table 2  Professional and untrained interpreter features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional skills</th>
<th>Untrained problems</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the aims, structures and common procedures and processes of the relevant service</td>
<td>Lack of knowledge of systems and processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced written and spoken competence in the languages worked in, and in formal specialist and informal terminology</td>
<td>Bias and distortion because of lack of language competence, especially knowledge of specialist terminology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate consecutive and simultaneous language-transfer skills</td>
<td>Inaccurate translation and mistranslation because of poor skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to continuous professional development</td>
<td>Personal unsuitability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adherence to codes of conduct and good practice</td>
<td>Lack of understanding of interpreting role, over-identification with client, lack of confidentiality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Contrasts between user views and professional standards

For the most part, the people we interviewed prefer and trust family and friends as interpreters over professional interpreters. If we look at the characteristics of good practice that people come up with in the interviews, user views about professional qualities and trustworthy practice are not an easy match with those that are dominant among service providers and professional interpreting guidelines given in Table 2. Below, for each of the features of professional good practice given in Table 2, we compare and contrast our user views.

- **Knowledge of the aims, structures and common procedures and processes of the relevant service:** there is no doubt that people see a knowledge of the structure and procedures of the organisations that they are using as beneficial, and we have shown that the idea of advice and advocacy from interpreters is generally welcomed since they are seen as having this kind of specialist knowledge. However, the people who we interviewed do not necessarily see this knowledge as solely the preserve of the professional interpreter. For example, they see interpreters from community organisations as a valuable source of this kind of help, and they would like family members and friends who act as interpreters for them to have this sort of knowledge.

- **Enhanced written and spoken competence in the languages worked in, and in formal specialist and informal terminology:** again, people who have used interpreters value such competence while not restricting it to professional interpreters. The relevance of formal specialist terminology is acknowledged in specific and important circumstances, such as the law and medicine.
• **Accurate consecutive and simultaneous language-transfer skills:** this is seen as essential for any interpreter but people view interpretation as involving far more than this. There is a stress on the importance of the interpreter being able to present someone’s case and a belief that, in order to be able to do this, the interpreter has to build up a relationship over time with their client. Good practice in this sense is the model based on trust developed with family and friends. The interpreter has a role that is wider than the transfer of words across languages.

• **Access to continuous professional development:** people who know about professional interpreters value the skills that they have developed over time and recognise that some kind of training is important. While social characteristics such as gender or age are generally seen as unimportant, personal character is seen as crucial. This is an issue involving far more than professional development and relates more to an interpreter’s personal qualities.

• **Adherence to codes of conduct and good practice:** there is general recognition of the importance of codes of conduct and good practice guidance in terms of helping to build the basis for trust in the role of the interpreters. However, it is in the basis for these codes of practice that there is most disjuncture between what users want and what professional codes of conduct assume they need. People recognise the importance of trust based on professional categories such as doctor, lawyer or professional interpreter — what we have called ‘abstract’ trust. This professional status gives them reassurances of confidentiality, lack of bias and competence. However, users want the advantages of familiarity and knowledge of the person fulfilling the role of interpreter. This is why, for the most part, they prefer and trust family and friends, or sometimes community representatives, over professional interpreters. This kind of ‘personal’ trust involves getting to know the interpreter rather than working with someone unknown to them. In other words, the traditional linguistic model of a distanced interpreter just passing on words is not recognised as good practice but is seen as indifference and bias towards the service provider. In this respect, the thrust of the professionalisation of the role of interpreters is somewhat at odds with users’ own definitions of good interpreting practice.

The findings from our examination of the experiences and understandings of people who need interpreters in order to gain access to, and use of, health, welfare, legal and other services provide something of a challenge to the dominant service-provider-focused and professional agenda on the topic. We believe that the distinctive nature of our findings arises from the particular approach taken by this research, which highlights users’ experiences rather than interpreters’ or service providers’ experiences. First, it has not been based on a particular service, nor has it
specifically accessed people through services. Rather, we have worked with community-based researchers who have accessed the people interviewed for this study through their own, often personal, contacts. In other words, we have accessed people who are unlikely to be reached by other methods. Second, our methodological approach has been in-depth interviews that have focused on understanding people’s lives as a whole, rather than their problems in using a specific service. We have placed their views in the biographical and cultural context of their lives as a whole in order to examine how needing interpreters to access and use services may be differently understood. The results of such an approach provide useful insights into why the few studies that address the issue find that people prefer family and friends to professional interpreters, and question the prevailing tendency to dismiss such findings as simply due to a lack of knowledge of the availability of professional interpreters.

**Recommendations**

Most people who speak little or no English will need to use professional interpreters in order to access and use services at some stage. Even if the people we interviewed often preferred family or friends to act as interpreters for them, not all could draw regularly, if at all, on their informal networks in this way. Moreover, they also saw the benefits for themselves of having professional interpreters available in some circumstances, notably for serious legal and medical matters. So, it is important that interpreting services are provided for them, and provided in a way that meets their needs. In this respect, the findings from our research point towards a quite different notion of professional practice than that currently being pursued.

As we overviewed above, one of the key lessons from our identification and examination of trust as a crucial issue for people who need interpreters to access and use services is that – from their perspective – personal and abstract trusts need to be combined, rather than relying separately on promoting abstract trust through the professionalisation of the interpreting role. The embodiment of trust in an interpreter is either a family member or friend who has professional skills and expertise, and who demonstrates some of the qualities evident in professional codes of good practice, or alternatively a professional interpreter who fulfils the obligations inherent in their role and is a familiar person.

This major finding points us in particular directions in making recommendations for policy and practice in interpreting provision, which are mutually compatible and aimed at particular audiences.
Interpreting training providers

- Training in the basics of interpreting should be made more widely available to members of different minority ethnic communities who are bilingual, especially family and friends who regularly act as interpreters, in the form of short courses rather than extended and time-consuming training. Such courses can provide information about the way that health, legal and other service procedures operate, and about the specialist language in use. The step-by-step training approach currently provided by some agencies could be extended, providing a range of stand-alone courses giving different levels of training and with the opportunity to move on to the next level if desired, rather than providing only an extended course that works directly towards a professional diploma.

- The notions of good practice embodied in training for professional interpreters should be extended to include the crucial issue of developing a personal and trustworthy relationship with the users they are aiding to access services. Training for professional interpreters should also include the nature of the political context within which they work, as well as within-community distinctions. Partnerships with community organisations in providing such training would be useful.

Interpreting service providers

- Just as it is recognised that professionals, such as solicitors, GPs, health visitors, social workers and so on, can best carry out their role by taking responsibility for a ‘caseload’ of clients with whom they establish an ongoing relationship, good practice and organisational procedures for interpreters should be extended to include this aspect of professionalism, rather than a peripatetic approach. This may prove even more cost-effective than a peripatetic service. Such a refocusing of professional interpreting services, however, is unlikely to be feasible in situations where people who need an interpreter who speaks a particular language are geographically dispersed. In such cases, family and friends may be the only consistent option for people combined with peripatetic professional interpreters.

- People who need and use professional interpreters should be provided with more information as a matter of routine good practice. In particular, information should be made widely available about how to access professional interpreters in appropriate formats and places. Furthermore, professional interpreters and bilingual staff acting as interpreters should introduce themselves and clarify both who they are and the extent of their role when they meet service users.
Conclusions and recommendations

Service practitioners who use interpreters

- Service practitioners who call on interpreters, whether professional interpreters or bilingual staff, in order to converse with service users should receive training about the importance of differences within communities, for example in terms of age, dialect, gender and political context. Partnerships with community organisations in providing such training would be useful.

- People use what limited English they may have as a strategy for assessing their interpreter’s competence and trustworthiness. Service practitioners should ensure that they use everyday, uncomplicated language as far as possible in communicating with service users with interpreters, whether these are professional or informal.

Currently, government policy in relation to people who speak little or no English focuses more on the provision of English-language classes than on providing good interpreting services. The pursuit of English-language competence is undoubtedly of benefit to people. Nonetheless, learning to speak English is not an activity that goes on in isolation from the rest of people’s lives. Speaking English, or not, has become part of a political debate that centres on issues about what it means to be a British citizen, and the ways in, and the extent to which, someone can choose to become part of a society. Within this unhelpful political context, there is the danger of losing sight of the point that there will continue to be people who speak little or no English and who need interpreters in order to access services. This situation demands a more flexible and nuanced policy response that recognises the complementarity of the provision of English-language learning and of high-quality interpreting services. In delivering such high-quality interpreting, the different and multiple ways in which individuals interact with overarching systems and services need to be placed centre stage. This – as our research has demonstrated – involves attention to the nature of trust and to developing a professional interpreting role that encompasses the features of personal as well as abstract trust.
Chapter 1

1 Our use of the term ‘community’ reflects its prevalence in discussions of service delivery to minority ethnic groups, rather than implying an homogeneous and clearly defined group. This is made particularly clear in our analysis in Chapter 4.

2 The Home Office survey definition of minority ethnic groups is ‘non-White’. In the sample as a whole, including white groups, just over 30 per cent spoke languages other than English most often at home, and just over 11 per cent needed help translating some or all of the questions.

3 Section 11 funding forms part of the 1966 Local Government Act, which empowers the Home Office to reimburse spending on ‘special provision … in consequence of the presence within their areas of substantial numbers of immigrants from the Commonwealth whose language or customs differ from those of the host community’ (cited in Kalka, 1991, p. 204). Although most of this money was spent on English-language provision for minority ethnic children, it was also used through the 1980s (particularly in the wake of the disturbances of 1980/81 and 1985) to promote ‘mother tongue' tuition and cultural activities.

4 In the wake of the Bradford unrest, Bradford MP Anne Cryer was quoted as saying that Muslim minorities suffered social exclusion because of the practice of bringing wives from the subcontinent who could not speak English and were responsible for perpetuating foreign cultures within the home – ‘importing poverty’ (The Guardian, 12 July 2001). At a recent conference on ‘New Citizens’, Chris Hedges, who was part of the citizenship advisory group chaired by Sir Bernard Crick, noted that, of 120,000 applications for naturalisation in 2002, 40,000 were from spouses of settled British citizens.

Chapter 2

1 The research assistants were employed on full- or part-time contracts by the universities during fieldwork. They received an induction into the aims and concerns of the project and were given training in how to conduct semi-structured interviews. They also had ongoing supervision and debriefing throughout their employment on the project. In addition, the research assistants were paid a consultancy fee for their further work in reading and commenting on the drafts of the report.
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