
Responding to the European Refugee Crisis: Interpreters with a Humanitarian Mission

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In the first half of November 2016, by the occasion of this year's Hieronymus's Days dedicated to interpretation and translation skills, the Czech Union of Interpreters and Translators (*Jednota tlumočnicků a překladatelů*, Czech acronym JTP) invited Barbara Delahayes from the University of Geneva to present a new piece of carefully designed software which could prove to be vitally important in the current refugee crisis.

The software has been developed by a team of four through the InZone organisation, a Centre at the University of Geneva which specialises in research into innovative approaches to communication during global disasters. The group have worked alongside the Red Cross, UN and Unicef among other non-profit organisations to ensure that their projects are directed to the areas of most need, and this talk presented a new software designed in response to this information. The software presented takes the form of an 'e-learning' module which provides clear, concise and critical training for non-professional humanitarian translators. Delahayes made clear the need for this software; in the event of a humanitarian crisis (whether a natural disaster, epidemic, or human conflict), translators are often members of the affected community, returning residents, or short term volunteers who perhaps have no formal training in translation but are simply on the ground at the time and due to their language skills are able to help.

Indeed there is a severe lack of professional translators, and it was noted that in Greece last summer humanitarian organisations calculated that 400 translators were needed to help with the migrant crisis: only 24 were provided. Translators are crucial in ensuring that the local community are not further harmed through a lack of information or representation in the decision and solution-making processes, and in individual cases where there may be necessary administrative and legal procedures to complete or in completing applications for asylum in foreign countries.

Without training, there are potential problems with using non-professional translators, such as a tendency to skim over certain details, select only what an individual deems important information, or the unintentional imposition of a bias of opinion. Thus, in this one hour module, participants are led through three significant issues for translators: professionalism, cultural issues, and psychological and self-care awareness.

The last aspect is particularly interesting, and Delahayes drew attention to the fact that self-care awareness is crucial to ensure that translators are able to conduct their work as best as possible, and recognise that their experience may also be traumatising at times. The format of the whole module includes multiple choice quizzes, scenarios, and anecdotal experiences as well as the option of attached extra resources so that participants can learn more about certain aspects of the training if they wish. The module uses a fairly basic level of English, both written and spoken, and clear formatting so that even those who are not confident using technology are able to utilise the module effectively.

Delahayes noted that this project is still a work in progress, and the hope is that it will be complete and accessible online (at disasterready.org) in early December. She hopes that the software will be preloaded onto flash drives and tablets so that in areas without internet access the training will still be available, and further noted that in the future it may be possible to develop the software available in other languages such as Greek and Arabic.

This Rapid Response module certainly has the potential to be of huge value during humanitarian crisis', addressing a need for professionalism in translating which is often neglected due to the lack of resources available during these situations. It will be interesting to see how effective the module is, and the potential future projects that may be developed as a result of it.