“¡AY CARAMBA!”
Understanding Language and Cultural Barriers on I&R Calls

Manny Solis
AIRS 37th I&R Training and Education Conference
May 30, 2015
Agenda

- Culture & Language Quiz
- LanguageLine Solutions Experience
- Interpreter Survey
- Top Five Interpreter Insights
- Working Tips for Call Agents
- Q&A
Culture and Language Quiz

- What is the #1 sport in the U.S. by fan base?
- What is the #1 sport in the world by fan base?
- How many languages are spoken in the world today?
- What are the Top 10 languages in the world?
Top 10 Languages in the World

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Speakers (millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1,197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lahnda</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LanguageLine Solutions Experience

We Handle Millions of Social Services and Emergency Calls Each Year

**Experience** • **Languages** • **Interpreters**

**Proudly Serving:**
- 10 of the top 10 Medical Facilities
- 9 of the top 10 Insurance Companies
- 7 of the top 10 Commercial Banks
- 1000s of Government Agencies
Interpreter Insights

911 Interpreter Survey

- Collective experience >3 million emergency calls/year
- Interpreters’ unique perspective with stressed callers
- 246 interpreters participated, representing 46 languages
- Identified most common language and cultural barriers
- Suggested approaches to improve communication
Insight #1: Problems with Addresses

Issues identified:

- Differences in alphabets
- Ignorance of address/location
- Literacy level of LEP caller
- Concept of “address” to LEPs
- Interpreters not familiar with street names in your jurisdiction
Insight #1: Problems with Address

Interpreter suggestions:

1. If the call taker has address information, ask the interpreter to confirm it with the LEP caller.
2. Team up with interpreter to clarify data and work through available information.
3. Have LEP caller spell, rather than say.
4. Suggest finding a piece of mail.
5. Use landmarks, descriptions to assist.
6. Patience.

Jenny Cantonese Interpreter #9433
Insight #2: Getting to the Point

Issues identified:

- Major cultural differences from English:
  - English is a very direct language
  - English speakers may be very direct
  - Other languages and cultures may take a different approach, even during emergencies
Insight #2: Getting to the Point

Interpreter suggestions:

1. Ask the LEP caller to respond “briefly” in 1 or 2 sentences.
2. Tell the LEP caller: “Please, I know you are upset, but please try to be specific and brief with your answer.”
3. Explain that the speed of response depends upon short, direct answers.
4. Ask “Yes” or “No” questions.
5. Patience. Indirect communication is a major cultural issue.

Lena
Russian
Interpreter #7812
Insight #3: Fear of Authorities

Issues identified:

- Experience from native country:
  - Government oppression
  - Corruption
  - Intimidation

- Immediate concerns of immigration status and deportation fears, fanned by media and LEP community

- Fears slow down collection of critical information
Insight #3: Fear of Authorities

Interpreter suggestions:

1. Explain to LEP callers beforehand the reason you need the background information.
3. Be respectful of the LEP caller.

Carlos
Spanish Interpreter #12924
Insight #4: Language and Dialect

Issues identified:

- Regional dialects of major languages
  - Spanish
  - Arabic
- LEP callers using “second languages”
  - Russian (former USSR)
  - French (former colonies)
  - Burmese (2nd language for 135 native languages)
- Accents, regional variations, LEP caller’s language proficiency complicate interpretation
Insight #4: Language and Dialect

Interpreter suggestions:

1. Trust interpreters skills
2. Maintain patience
3. Use simple language
4. Allow interpreter to clarify

Amirtha
Tamil
Interpreter #10622
Insight #5: Relations and Relationships

Issues identified:

- “Children”
- “Brothers” and “Sisters”
- Surnames
- Family Ties
- Traditional roles of men and women
Insight #5: Families and Relationships

Interpreter suggestions:
1. Recognize cultural dynamics at work.
2. Ask for clarification, when needed.
3. Patience.

Florence
Haitian Creole
Interpreter #4588
Working Tips For Call Agents

Provide instructions to the interpreter.
Working Tips For Call Agents

Speak to the LEP caller directly.
Working Tips For Call Agents

Allow interpreters to do their job.
Working Tips For Call Agents

Interpreters need to clarify.
Avoid interrupting unless necessary.
Exercise patience.
Questions?

Manuel Solis
Strategic Account Executive

408-983-1321
msolis@languageline.com
www.languageline.com