"Not everyday business." A caseworker perspective on interpreter provision for deaf refugees and cooperation with interpreters

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Abstract

This contribution discusses the communication needs of deaf asylum applicants from the viewpoint of asylum interviewers (caseworkers). The study is based on 13 qualitative interviews with Austrian caseworkers in late 2020, which sought to explore how caseworkers perceive asylum claims involving deaf applicants and how they approach finding and engaging with interpreters in such cases. The results show that both finding interpreters and interviewing deaf applicants are perceived as challenging. Due to lack of knowledge about deaf people's communicative needs and lack of expertise in working with signed languages (SL) and Deaf or signed language interpreters (SLI), caseworkers trust in the expertise of interpreters and representatives of deaf associations and cooperate with them to determine a suitable arrangement for the interview situation and finding interpreters. There are no institutionalised support structures in place, so caseworkers rely on their subjective perceptions and intuitive ad hoc solutions and feedback from the interpreters. The study also suggests a need for awareness-raising regarding the needs of deaf applicants and the context-inherent risks of perpetuating an ableist perspective, as well as the need for interprofessional training among caseworkers and interpreters.

1. Introduction

   This article discusses the communication needs of deaf[1] refugees in asylum proceedings from the perspective of asylum interviewers, henceforth referred to as caseworkers, and with a focus on interpreting. This qualitative study, which is based on 13 qualitative interviews with Austrian caseworkers conducted in late 2020, explores how caseworkers perceive cases involving deaf applicants and recruiting and engaging with interpreters in such cases. As "individuals with limited capacity in the dominant language of a given space" (Ruiz Rosendo & Martin 2024, 11), deaf asylum seekers have particular communication needs and may thus be viewed as particularly vulnerable in the asylum determination process. They may, in fact, be considered as exposed to a double vulnerability by being a refugee and having a disability, both of which are categories that put them at a communicative disadvantage in a power-infused environment such as asylum proceedings.

   In line with the call for papers for this special issue, vulnerability, as an identifying category, can be viewed as an "inherent" (Rogers, Mackenzie & Dodds 2012) embodied element of human life in the sense of "corporeal vulnerability" (Butler 2004). In a broader sense, and with reference to a situational context, it can also be defined as being susceptible to an "increased risk of harm or having reduced capacity or power to protect one's interests" (Mackenzie 2013, 34). As such, an increased degree of vulnerability can but does not necessarily need to be attributed to refugees as members of a heterogenous group that can be affected by a compound range of diverse "intersectional vulnerabilities" (Mendola, Parroco & Donni 2020) compared to other groups within a given host country's dominant population. Refugees are frequently exposed to multiple inequalities arising from the predicament of forced displacement and the concomitant collapse

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[1] Following Kusters and Friedner (2015, ix), I use "deaf" with a lowercase "d" as a "more encompassing, and less politicized" term; a capitalised "D" ("Deaf") is used to refer to Deaf interpreters or Deaf-Blind people. My use of "refugee" follows the definition outlined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (United Nations 1951).

of their living circumstances, but also from additional factors pertaining to age, educational and social background, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), or physical or cognitive disabilities.[2] It thus seems important to pay specific attention to how the communicative needs of deaf asylum seekers (applicants for international protection) are being met through interpreting in asylum proceedings, and to discuss what communicative environment is needed in such a specific context to allow them to preserve their self-autonomy and agency.

With a focus on interpreting, scholarship has addressed specific vulnerabilities arising, for instance, when interpreting for minors in asylum cases (Keselman et al. 2008; Sultanić 2021), for applicants with a SOGIESC background (Maryns 2013; Jacobs & Maryns 2023; Verhaeghe, Jacobs & Maryns 2023), or for survivors of domestic violence and abuse (Toledano Buendía & del Pozo Triviño 2014; Tipton 2023). Others have considered vulnerabilities arising when interpreting in the field of mental health (Bot 2018) or, in general, with a focus on vulnerability in asylum procedures (Määttä, Puumala & Ylikomi 2021), while the specific communicative needs of particular other groups have been underrepresented. To my knowledge, there is a gap in research on both interpreter-mediated asylum interviews involving deaf applicants as a particular group with special needs and on how users, including caseworkers and other institutional representatives, asylum applicants, and possibly their legal representatives or legal aids, perceive such cases and co-construct and co-configure cooperation with interpreters in this delicate communicative universe. This contribution, then, takes a specific angle and discusses how caseworkers approach cases with deaf applicants and how they perceive their cooperation with interpreters in such situations, and considers what implications this may have for deaf applicants.

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[2] I use "disability" in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2007).

My discussion of this topic is based on the notion that translation and interpreting have always been shaped and impacted by intricate asymmetries and power inequalities (Carbonell i Cortés & Monzó-Nebot 2021, 1). The asylum system is one of those contexts where power asymmetries have become institutionalised and are also being perpetuated through the "inner beliefs" (Kobelinsky 2019) and "institutional habitus" (Affolter 2021) of the caseworkers, who hold considerable power over applicants in an overall situation of "geopolitical asymmetries imposed by global markets and the global politics of war" (Carbonell i Cortés & Monzó-Nebot 2021, 2). In their history of social work(ing), Chapman and Withers (2019) point to the "violent benevolence" and "interlocking oppressions" (8) that are often present in social work, where normative views deprive individuals of their agency and thus perpetuate systems of, for instance, racism, sexism, disablism, heterosexism, and so forth. While neither caseworkers nor interpreters are, of course, social workers per se, working and interpreting in such a power-infused, yet fragile social environment like the asylum procedure may contribute to reinforcing power structures and also perpetuate "white abled supremacy" (Chapman & Withers 2019, 6), particularly when dealing with highly vulnerable groups. Both caseworkers and interpreters may be "complicit in systems of oppression and domination" (375) even when they possibly actively seek to oppose contextual disadvantages (see Ioannidis, Dimou & Dadusc 2021). Along with the caseworkers, who remould the applicants' narratives into a written conglomerate of textual pieces that inform their decisions (Jacquemet 2009), interpreters also assume a powerful role in presenting, representing, and potentially perpetuating inequalities and vulnerabilities through their passing of meaning between two often very disparate worlds with potentially different world views:

> Thus, the role of language is very crucial for power, and when language is assigned the task of translating culture, it translates power under the dynamics of representation, and the one who represents becomes in a position of power, while the represented goes nowhere other than to the position of silence and muteness. (El Amri 2019, 4)

I address the topic under consideration from a specific power-infused positionality: as a white woman who is able-bodied and non-deaf, having been socialised in an industrialised migration host country, writing from both a privileged academic perspective and an outsider position about a particular group in its role as receiver of interpreting services, and not sharing pivotal characteristics with either deaf people or refugees. My research interests are fuelled both by my background as spoken-language interpreter and researcher with several years of research history in the field of asylum interpreting, whereby I noticed that I had mostly come across studies on spoken-language asylum interpreting despite having been socialised academically in a context where signed language interpreting (SLI) education is offered alongside spoken-language interpreter training. What sparked my interest were discussions with SLI colleagues and the fact that I had privately met deaf refugees and started wondering how immigration and asylum proceedings had worked for them. My interests lie in addressing structural processes and institutional views, with my interview partners being mostly white male system representatives who are affiliated with an institution that is shaped by those intrinsic asymmetrical power relations briefly outlined above. With regard to the applicants and their cases that are mentioned by my interviewees, I cannot disclose details regarding the specifics of their claims, their origin, or personal backgrounds. My interpretations, therefore, despite any attempt at providing a balanced analysis, will be a partial snippet of one reality, and my research, both for this contribution and previous research, has certainly been influenced by a certain degree of "intercorporeal vulnerability" (van Wingerden 2022), in the sense of a "bodily hexis" (Bourdieu 1977), which lies at the core of any process of knowledge cultivation.

Based on these introductory remarks and my review of the literature, I seek to address the following research questions: How do caseworkers describe cases involving deaf applicants? How do they frame and perceive working with interpreters in such cases and also, what challenges do they perceive? In addition, what impact may their strategies have on both deaf applicants and interpreters?

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Interpreting for vulnerable groups and deaf people in legal settings

Dimensions of vulnerability have been discussed in interpreting studies as an influential element when it comes to interpreting for particular social groups (for instance, Tipton 2017; Postigo Pinazo 2020). With a focus on interpreting in asylum proceedings, Määttä, Puumala, and Ylikomi (2021) identify three dimensions of vulnerability that may reproduce unequal power relations: linguistic (linked to interpretation), psychological (linked to trauma), and epistemic (linked to systemic and structural power hierarchies). The term "epistemic violence" has also been used by Sheneman and Robinson (2021) to discuss how notions of ableism and the "pathologization of bodymind differences" (55) among helping professions, also including SLI, may deny disabled people agency through specific behaviour or strategies, sometimes under the "veneers of respectability [and] benevolence" (59). In a study on interpreter-mediated interviews with survivors of abuse, Tipton (2023, 185) adds "professional vulnerability" as another category to describe actions that have impact on interpreters' "perceived and actual vulnerability." Psychological vulnerabilities, as mentioned above, including vicarious traumatisation, have also been shown to be prevalent among interpreters (Darroch & Dempsey 2016) and may, of course, also particularly affect interpreters and caseworkers in an asylum environment which comes with potentially harrowing content. In this respect, Sultanić (2022) has pointed out how rendering accounts of trauma by refugee children may prove demanding for interpreters and require specific coping strategies. Furthermore, with a focus on minors as a particularly vulnerable group in asylum proceedings, Keselman et al. (2008) have addressed the challenges related to interpreting particular question types and questioning strategies that may ultimately contribute to silencing the voice of minor applicants. Similarly, disclosure in SOGIESC cases (Jacobs & Maryns 2023) may also be linked to strong degrees of vulnerability and interpreters' strategies for rendering specific discursive elements may contribute to obscuring the "indexical load" (165) of applicants' accounts (see also Maryns 2013). Based on a review of decisions, Verhaeghe, Jacobs, and Maryns (2023)

also outline specific vulnerabilities connected to credibility assessment in cases of lesbian applicants and show how their claims are assessed against normative and essentialist views on sexual orientation, making it difficult for them to prove the authenticity of their claims. What can be surmised from all of these studies is that communicative environments that come with a power differential carry the risk of not fully taking into account the needs of more vulnerable individuals, and that all the stakeholders involved, including interpreters, may thus potentially contribute to silencing the voices of those who are already at a disadvantage. Interpreters need specific awareness of both the intricate power relations, which are also mirrored through language, and their own potential biases as their individual decision-making may also be triggered by subjective perceptions of their clients' vulnerabilities (Tipton 2023, 188). Interpreters may, in particular, need "more fluid" strategies in such power-infused environments than in other settings, which may contradict tenets of deontological codes (Rudvin & Pesare 2015, 106).

Inequalities and linguistic barriers to due processes for signed language (SL) users in legal settings have, in general, been widely discussed in deaf studies and sociolinguistics (for instance, Miller & Vernon 1994; Brennan & Brown 1997; Shuy 2003; Eades 2012). SL interpreting in legal settings, which had long been viewed "as an area that many interpreters refuse to touch because of its inherent complexity" (Turner 1995, 265), has been discussed with a focus on interpreting modes (Russell 2002; Hale et al. 2017), court, police, or prison interpreting (Turner 1995; Turner & Brown 2001; Hoopes 2003; Miller 2003), the use of Deaf-hearing interpreter teams (Mathers 2009; Russell & Shaw 2016), juror duty of deaf individuals (Hale et al. 2017), video remote interpreting (Napier & Leneham 2011; Napier 2012; 2013) or interpreting in border settings (Ramsey & Peña 2010).[3] Within the EU *JustiSigns*[4] project, a survey on SL provision, standards, and training for

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[3] Deaf interpreters are deaf fluent signers who are trained as interpreters and often teamed with spoken-language or SLI to account for the specifics of deaf cultures which may be better understood by deaf consumers (see, e.g., Russell 2018).

[4] See http://www.justisigns.com; also see the JustiSigns2 project on the empowerment of people who experience domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence, https://justisigns2.com.

legal settings was conducted (Napier & Haug 2017), calling for more and specific training for SL interpreting in legal settings (see also Witter-Merithew & Nicodemus 2010; Roberson, Russell & Shaw 2011; 2012). More recently, the CLIMB (Cultivating Legal Interpreters from Minority Backgrounds) project at the University of North Colorado sought to address the (continued) shortage of qualified legal interpreters and create career paths for specialisation in legal interpreting, particularly for interpreters of colour or from heritage signing backgrounds (University of Colorado n.d.). The right to interpretation for deaf persons has also been taken up in a European Union (EU) context (see Hertog 2015, 20) and is also mentioned in Article 3 of the EU Directive 2010/64/EU (European Parliament & Council of the European Union 2010). Overall, however, interpreting for deaf asylum applicants in asylum procedures still seems to be underrepresented in this corpus of scholarship.

2.2 Vulnerability in an asylum context from a legal perspective

International humanitarian law views vulnerability as a category that intrinsically applies to all refugees (European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) 2017, 7), with the *M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece* decision issued by the European Court of Human Rights (2011) as a milestone. Such a generalisation and potentially paternalistic essentialisation of vulnerability among refugees can also be viewed critically, as it may perpetuate stereotyping, ignores individuals' "subjective realities of individual experience" (Tipton 2023, 177), and denies refugees individual agency (Gilson 2014; Tipton 2023, 177–178). Relevant regulations under the Common European Asylum System and its EU Asylum Acquis identify an increased need for the protection of "particular groups" of applicants (ECRE 2017, 12), though there is no common or consistent definition of vulnerability (ECRE 2017, 13–15). The EU Asylum Procedures Directive (European Parliament & Council of the European Union 2013a), for instance, includes "special procedural guarantees" for particular groups, including disability as a category (par. 29). The EU Reception Directive (European Parliament & Council of the European Union 2013b) outlines "special reception needs of vulnerable

persons" (Art. 22) under Chapter IV "Provisions for vulnerable persons." The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) has developed a "vulnerability toolkit" which is intended to help caseworkers with vulnerability case management (EUAA 2023).

The categories of vulnerability included in the respective national regulations vary (ECRE 2017, 16–25). In Austria, for instance, which serves as the background to this study, the relevant EU mechanisms for the identification and protection of the needs of particularly vulnerable applicants have not been fully and consistently implemented (Matti 2016b; 2016a): No specific procedures for the identification of individuals with special procedural needs nor specific qualification requirements for caseworkers processing such cases are in place (Matti 2016a, 75).

2.3 Communication with deaf refugees

Deaf individuals communicate in different ways, depending on their individual background, cognitive competences, and the context. The communication means involved include: (national) SL and diverse regional variants, or idiosyncratic, and sociolectal variants depending on age, ethnicity, or gender, which may not exist in all countries; International Sign (IS) as a signed system that is a shared means of communication allowing "communication across language boundaries" (Rosenstock & Napier 2015, 1) though it may not be understood by all; home signs (idiosyncratic signs), if deaf people have not received SL education and don't have linguistic fluency in a signed or written language; lipreading; diverse manual signed systems (manually coded language, finger alphabets, cued speech, Makaton); communication via tactile means (Lorm) in the case of Deaf-Blind people; use of hearing technologies (hearing aids, cochlear implants) and spoken languages. Some deaf persons who have gone through formal education will also have written and sometimes spoken skills in their national (and other) spoken language(s), though deaf learners are faced with specific obstacles in literacy acquisition and the acquisition of spoken-language skills (Spencer & Marschark 2010, 3–9; Lederberg, Schick & Spencer 2013; see also Henner & Robinson 2023 on communicative competencies and proficiency expectations

in the framework of crip linguistics). In addition, deaf people often also have to rely on SLI.

In general, people with a disability, including deaf individuals, experience varying degrees of environmental, linguistic, or attitudinal barriers and sometimes even stigmatisation, depending on the concrete political, social, and cultural context (World Health Organization (WHO) 2011, 183–185). Disabled refugees are, to an even greater degree, faced with isolation and information deprivation, often due to communication barriers, lack of access to services (e.g., safe and barrier-free shelter, support structures, and mainstream and specialised services and equipment) and lack of satisfaction of "basic material and emotional needs" (Yeo 2015, 524; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2021). Support structures are often only or mostly provided through migrant self-help or peer groups[5] (Grotheer & Schroeder 2019, 87).

Regarding forced displacement, estimates from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) suggest a rate of about 15% of refugees with disabilities, suggesting that worldwide, more than 10 million people with different types of disabilities have been forcibly displaced from their home countries, including also deaf refugees (e.g., see the MobileDeaf project and its focus on forced migration, MobileDeaf n.d.). No systematic statistics, however, account for the number of deaf refugees who, due to the "invisibility" of their deafness (Crock et al. 2017) remain a "hidden" group among others with more visible disabilities (Köbsell 2019, 66).

Legally, medically, and in statistics, hearing losses are generally addressed as a type of disability. Not all deaf people, however, agree with this categorisation, and instead see deafness as a "difference" rather than a "disability" (Harvey 2008). Such a rhetoric of difference, however, may also be viewed as a token of "[a]bleist [r]hetoric" (Robinson 2010) mirroring "internalized broader attitudes about bodily and mental differences" (8). As Robinson argues, the cultivation of deaf cultural identity has historically also been shaped by

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[5] See "Deaf Refugees" groups, for instance, DeafRefugees.de, including links to other countries (DeafRefugees.de 2023).

ambivalence where privileged (white) deaf representatives advocated "deaf cultural membership" (18) while at the same time advocating, openly or opaquely, mainstream ableist attitudes, thus reinforcing differences between different deaf groups. There is also a discussion in the pertinent literature as to whether the mutual experience of hearing loss and its concomitant social repercussions produce a shared feeling of Deafhood (Ladd 2015). Similar to the ongoing discussion on the essentialisation of refugeehood, Ruiz-Williams et al. (2015), for instance, suggest a multifaceted intersectional approach to the "Deafhood concept" (Ladd 2003, 11), which in their view is based on the idea of an essentialist "DEAF-SAME" framework, and instead suggest to also "carve out a space for DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, and Hard of Hearing signing people's experiences to come to the fore rather than be erased by a presumptuous, singular, and essentialist term, Deaf" (Ruiz-Williams et al. 2015, 234).

Deaf refugees are a heterogenous group (Trengereid Olsen 2019, 17), with diverse social and educational backgrounds, who are exposed to diverse vulnerabilities. Social isolation and access to social and support services are challenging and informal support networks play a crucial role here (Willoughby 2008, 105; Trengereid Olsen 2018, 239f.). Access to education and language classes is also challenging (Willoughby 2008, 7) and lack of access may potentially increase deaf refugees' vulnerability (3). Here, both facilitation of language development among children (71) and access to educational support for adults may pose obstacles for deaf refugees (see also Duggan, Holmström & Schönström 2023 on the positive and negative impacts of translanguaging practices in adult language classes for deaf migrants).

Lack of access to information and language barriers (Sivunen 2019, 12) as well as lack of access to interpreters or lack of adequate interpretation (Ward, Amas & Lagnado 2008) play a major role in all of these social life situations and contribute to deaf refugees' isolation (Roberts & Harris 2002), with language being the "key to autonomy in a new land" (Trengereid Olsen 2018, 237). If interpreters are available, deaf refugees may also not be familiar with working with interpreters (Sivunen 2019, 11). Additionally, informally used

multimodal communication strategies, which sometimes help in everyday situations, are not sufficient for complex administrative procedures such as asylum procedures (Sivunen 2019, 9), though sometimes, due to lack of adequate administrative processes, applicants "have no choice but to accept the situation . . . and hope for the best" (Sivunen 2019, 12). In a master's thesis that is one of the few publications available on the situation of deaf asylum applicants in Austria, Siebel (2019, 73) also points to inadequate or unprofessional reception and support structures and structural barriers, despite contrary claims by officials. In addition, deaf refugees also face lack of access to information and difficulties in everyday communicative situations, which makes them dependent on help and simple activities time-intensive (73). Lack of access to interpreters and faulty interpretation and long waiting times (62–63) are further problems, all of which aggravate isolation (59). Applicants also face inadequate means of learning the national languages (written skills in oral language and, if in existence, a national SL) as language courses are mostly spoken-language courses with only a few exceptions (59–60).

From what little is known about the Austrian context of interpreting for deaf refugees, we find a variety of situations, similar to what has been described by Trengereid Olsen (2019) or Sivunen (2019): use of interpreters who know the applicants' national SL and the national spoken language (which is rarely the case); use of national SL or national spoken-language interpreters (either one or in a team); use of a team of Deaf and hearing national SL and national spoken-language interpreters; use of interpreters who know the applicant's national spoken language (sometimes also in a team with Deaf and/or hearing national SL or national spoken-language interpreters); use of interpreters with IS skills; use of written communication, and use of non-deaf family members in combination with spoken-language interpreters (Siebel 2019, 66–69). Trengereid Olsen, for instance, points out that SLI will sometimes need "more unconventional forms of communication" (Trengereid Olsen 2019, 16) when working for deaf refugees (see also Hollauf 2012 who, also in a master's thesis, discusses specific strategies interpreters use in working

with deaf migrants, including simplification, clarification, or consecutive interpretation).[6]

   Generally, the professionalisation of SL interpreting only started in the twentieth century, and there are still many national differences as regards professionalisation, including SLI education and certification. Before its professionalisation, SLI were mostly heritage users from deaf communities (Stone, Roy & Brunson 2023, 227). Qualified SLI are usually trained in interpreting between one (or several) spoken languages and a national SL, IS, or both, and more recently training has also been offered for Deaf interpreters (286). While there are similarities between spoken-language and SL public service interpreting, such as, for instance, working for minority group members in unequal power constellations and the need for interpreter role clarification, there are also differences (Napier 2015, 135): apart from practical differences that are grounded in the visual modality, the range of settings in which SLI work differs, community influence had a greater impact on the evolution of interpreter roles (Napier 2015, 135), and funding is mostly based on disability legislation instead of equal access regulations (Stone, Roy & Brunson 2023, 277). Professional associations, such as the US National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators (NAJIT) generally recommend that interpreters work in teams both in spoken-language and SL legal contexts to guarantee due process for assignments that are presumed to be longer and more complex (NAJIT 2020); for SL interpreting, team interpreting has come to be considered an "industry standard" (2) by associations such as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, and interpreters also work in teams of SL and Deaf interpreters. SLI interpreters often work for deaf people from their own country. Globalisation and migration, however, have brought about changes that also impact on SL interpreting, with SLI having to interpret more frequently for persons from immigrant minority populations (Stone, Roy & Brunson 2023, 287), the asylum context being one example of such a type of

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[6] From the viewpoint of crip linguistics (Henner & Robinson 2023), which promotes the validation of non-standardised language use, some of these communication strategies could be viewed as examples of a deficit-based perception of deaf consumers' language repertoires.

assignment. Interpreting for persons from a different country, with perhaps a different SL and from different deaf communities, may thus prove challenging for interpreters and may also entail problems for both the deaf refugees and the other stakeholders in a given situation.

2.4 Interprofessional cooperation

The complex procedural, legal, linguistic, and contextual framework outlined above suggests that a shared understanding of these complexities and joint cooperative efforts are paramount to guarantee communicative success. "Cooperation" is one of those much used words, not only since the functionalist turn in translation studies, including Holz-Mänttäri's (1984) then novel approach to cooperation in translational action. Pym holds that, though cooperation is "the aim of translation" (Pym 2000, 188), translators cannot be held exclusively responsible for reaching that goal, as both sides have interests. These interests may be ideally, though not necessarily, commensurable interests—which may not be the case in the asylum setting. Depending on the translator's concrete actions, Pym talks about an "ethics of contextualized human relations" (2000, 190) instead of mere adherence to deontological tenets. Cooperation between representatives of two professions has come to be called interprofessional cooperation and as such has been discussed comprehensively for healthcare interpreting (Gryesten et al. 2023).[7]

Tipton (2016), with regard to social work, refers to the generation of "occupational intercultures" (2016, 436), where interpreting may disturb the communicative practices of the respective other profession. The need for joint interprofessional education (Krystallidou 2023) and user training (Felberg & Sagli 2023) has also been widely acknowledged. Departing from Pym's

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[7] There is a large body of literature on cooperation between Deaf interpreters and SLI which I have not included in this brief review.

thoughts on effort distribution in "risk management" in translation (Pym 2015), where he discusses three low- or high-level risks, including "credibility" (trust in the translator and the "product" of translation), "uncertainty" (actions in the case of comprehension issues), and "communicative" (actions to ensure the success of a communicative instance) risks, Tipton suggests that risk management is, in addition, a "joint enterprise" (2017, 126), similar to what Bot (2018, 61) terms "interactive" style of cooperation that acknowledges the "core values and practices of each other's trade." Looking at what motivates caseworkers' decisions, Kobelinsky (2019) suggests in an interview study that interviewers often base their decisions on "intime conviction" (2019, 53), which is defined as an inner deep-seated belief, which is not a legal category. Such inner beliefs may also include beliefs about communication with particular groups, interpreting, and cooperation with interpreters.

3. Methodology and contextual background

3.1 Methodological approach

The research questions outlined in the introduction have been examined based on qualitative data obtained from interviews with caseworkers taking case-based and individual decisions in first-instance asylum cases in Austria. The material discussed is unique, to my knowledge, as it presents a user-based (caseworkers') perspective on interpreting for deaf applicants for international protection. The data were collected through online interviews in late 2020, and before Russia's aggression against Ukraine, therefore interpreting for Ukrainian deaf refugees is not included in this data set.[8] The

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[8] Specific regulations apply to the reception of Ukrainian refugees which differ from the regular procedure. Communication with Ukrainian deaf refugees may also differ, in that Ukraine has made efforts to safeguard disability rights and had an active Society of the Deaf before the war, which may also have had an influence on Ukrainian deaf refugees' awareness of their rights and communicative strategies (personal communication, Austrian SLI; see also WHO 2023).

interviews were semi-structured in-depth interviews, following an interview guide I had prepared in advance to guarantee thematic consistency while allowing, at the same time, for flexibility to accommodate individual interviewees' modes of narrating their experiences. Generally, access to caseworkers, as the target group I sought to address, is difficult (Nikolaidou, Rehnberg & Wadensjö 2019). The type of sampling that was adopted for this study could best be described as purposive sampling: through previous contacts, who served as gatekeepers, I obtained official permission from the responsible department at the Federal Ministry of the Interior to conduct interviews with caseworkers. A description of my research proposal and an interview request were sent on my behalf through the regular internal communication channels to caseworkers at the different federal asylum offices across the country with my contact details for replies. I conducted 13 qualitative interviews in total with caseworkers from different regions in Austria (10 men and 3 women; I did not ask for gender self-reporting during the interviews and gender assignation was done by the author on a traditional binary scale). Due to lack of official data on the total number of caseworkers employed across the country or the number of deaf applicants in relation to general application statistics, it is not possible to relate this response rate to the total sample universe. I cannot provide background information on the caseworkers themselves due to data protection.

The interviews were transcribed using a form of simple semantic transcription (Dresing, Pehl & Schmieder 2015), and coded (computer-assisted via MAXQDA) and analysed qualitatively, combining a data-based and theoretical coding approach (Kuckartz & Rädiker 2022).[9] All transcriptions were approved officially by my contact at the Ministry of the Interior, and official permission to use the material was obtained.

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[9] Transcription conventions are as follows: voiced hesitations were marked as "eh," long pauses over 3 seconds as "(…)," emphasis as capitalisations, examples of particular words and phrases as '','' word truncations as "/," overlapping talk as "//," and additional information was given in brackets.

3.2 Contextual background

Based on national and EU legislation as well as international humanitarian instruments, Austria also has a multi-tier asylum and aliens law procedure, which is an administrative procedure. It starts with an initial registration process through police departments upon lodging of a claim, followed by an admission procedure under the Dublin regulation which determines the admissibility of a claim. An individual-case in-merit procedure takes place if the claim is admitted in the first instance. And there is also the option of a second-instance (in specific cases third-instance) appeal procedure. The General Administrative Procedures Act 1991 (Austria 1991) regulates the use of interpreters: "§ 39a. (1) If a party or a person to be examined has no sufficient command of the German language, is mute, deaf, or whose hearing is severely impeded, an interpreter (official interpreter) available to the authority shall be called in."

It is only since 2018 that interpreters working for asylum and police departments have been listed in a centralised register, which has replaced the diverse individual lists through which interpreters were recruited before. New applicants to this register have to pass an examination to be admitted to the register at different qualification levels (exemptions are made for trained interpreters). At the time of writing, the register still includes more non-trained than trained interpreters for spoken languages and it registers 35 interpreters for Austrian Sign Language, 5 interpreters for IS, and 1 Deaf interpreter (personal communication, 2.10.2023). Generally, SL interpreting has achieved a higher level of professionalisation in Austria than other fields of (dialogue) interpreting, also including asylum and police interpreting (Grbić 2023), with tertiary level interpreter training, a very active professional association, and a professional certification and licensing system (2023, 376).

4. Data presentation and discussion

In what follows, I will first focus on organisational and structural aspects and interpreter recruitment, before focusing on challenges that were mentioned by the caseworkers.

4.1 General matters and interpreter recruitment

4.1.1 Non-routine cases

Generally, all interviewees remarked that cases with deaf applicants ranked very low in their case statistics and were not common in their daily routines. While some had only had one such case, others had had more, but, in these cases, the majority could not remember the exact numbers, also due to lack of general statistics on cases with deaf or hard-of-hearing applicants. The specific cases they remembered were either recent cases or sometimes dated back several years, which needs to be borne in mind when discussing the data.

What the caseworkers' answers clearly suggest is that asylum interviews involving deaf applicants are viewed as "special" cases where caseworkers' routine strategies do not always work, and which are not "everyday business":[10]

> And you have to communicate that to all, because everyone needs to know that, because there is a *special case*. Because you can't communicate with that person like that. Today you can communicate with almost anyone. English works almost anytime. (I2, 26; emphasis added)

The fact that communicating with deaf individuals requires special arrangements is not necessarily viewed negatively, but more as a situation that is perceived as interesting and out of the ordinary. At the same time, however, such specific cases may require a greater degree of sensitivity and make it necessary to perhaps pay more attention than in other cases to cooperation with interpreters and to how interpreting "works" (I6, 53): "Well, as I said, you have to tackle the case in a more sensitive way. You have to take a close look. You

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[10] The information given in brackets after the quotes refers to respective interviews and the MAXQDA code segments. All quotes used are translations of the German interview segments (translation by the author).

have to make sure that the interview situation works, as mentioned, well, with the interpreters, that that works" (I6, 53).

Cases with deaf applicants also require more effort and preparation on the part of the caseworkers, compared to routine cases, and may carry a greater degree of ambiguity than other cases:

> Put it this way, if you/ if you don't do some sort of self-instruction, then you sit there and then you simply don't know how you should react, how you should deal with that sensibly. And that also would not be fair towards the people in my view. (I13, 76)

The visual aspect of SL communication may be one of the factors that makes cases with deaf applicants "special" and even "mega-interesting to watch" (I4, 35), but at the same time they may be baffling for caseworkers, if not slightly irritating: "And they, like I said, they constantly stared at me" (I7, 57).

Distinct gaze patterns and prolonged visual contact as pivotal characteristics of SL communication may, in fact, be perceived as awkward by caseworkers who are not familiar with deaf cultures, and are also associated with difficulties in assessing the truth of what is being said:

> Because a hearing person, for instance, if he lies a story [sic], then he averts his eyes from the interviewer. He tells his story of how he fled his country boredly, looks around the room, here, I exactly notice that it is learned by heart and everything else does not interest him. But the deaf person stares at you all the time. There I don't see a difference. (I7, 45)

With a focus on the use of signs and gestures, as another bodily communication means that may be unfamiliar to non-signers, another caseworker mentioned the "excitation" (I2, 80) which is linked with the interview situation. He seems to use this specific word to explain a situation that he perceives as chaotic and emotion-laden, and which he describes both as "creepy" and at the same time "impressive" (I2, 76):

> If you don't know it. And if the people/ and above all this excitation, then this also get loud, yes. And then it becomes strange, yes. Then there is loud gesticulating,

that was/ that is that what/ that's why I still remember this case. I think if all of that had gone smoothly, I would not have been able to remember. That was what actually was impressive, yes. (I2, 80; emphasis added)

The fact that the longer duration of interviews with deaf applicants is mentioned by almost all interviewees also suggests that this is another reason why they are perceived as different. Interviews are described as, for instance, "very very slow" (I3, 9) and "very time-intensive" (I13, 76). The time factor certainly plays a major role for the caseworkers, and perhaps is one of the factors why such cases are perceived as particularly "exhausting" (I13, 41), both for the caseworkers but also the applicants, and interpreters:

Every interview lasted six-and-a-half hours, but I already knew because of my experience: Don't plan anything else for this day! Make/ take your TIME. TIME! And and give the people the OPPORTUNITY to make themselves UNDERSTOOD. (I11, 42)

And with the sign language interpreter I really noticed it, he really asked each time: "Can we have a break?" Because it really was very very exhausting for him. But he did very well, you really have to say that! (I13, 41)

What is interesting in this example is that the caseworker and the interpreter are verbally constructed as a unit, through the use of the inclusive "us," suggesting that cooperation is indeed viewed as beneficial (see also Trengereid Olsen 2019).

4.1.2 Case allocation and interpreter recruitment

Case allocation, in general, differs. Cases may be assigned to the caseworkers based on their expertise (in certain regions or countries) or their experience with particular special-needs cases, their individual workload, or simply the inflow of new cases. Two of the caseworkers, both women, mention that they assume they were assigned these specific cases because of their gender and their age, respectively. One caseworker had previously dealt with gender-based violence cases and was, thus, automatically assigned a particular case of a woman that

had been raped: "Well, you know, because it dealt with a rape, which I had already had. And that is, you know, such a sensitive topic, it is difficult. It is difficult in any case, right?" (I8, 43), and the second caseworker assumed that she had been assigned this specific case because she was younger and more "empathetic" (I4, 19):

> Well, good question. (laughing) I think a bit, because I am still young and often quite empathetic in interviews, I think. My inter/ my team leader thought that I surely am one of the better contact persons because I already knew before the start that I was supposed to be a bit more empathetic in this interview, that that would also take a bit longer, probably, because all persons need to get warmed up before. So that the conversation then goes smoothly. (I4, 19)

The interview material generally also confirms that caseworkers receive little information on the applicants before they meet with them, either through records of the initial police which mostly contain applicants' particulars, including their language, and information on their routes of arrival, but few details as regards their language proficiency and specifics of the communicative situation. Some maintain that these records nonetheless allow them to assess whether to expect problems in the in-merit interview and help them to fine-tune the interview setup: "The police officers are the first [ones] who realise this and have to document [this] in the initial interview. Because they will see that it does not work" (I8, 27).

Following case allocation and familiarisation with the available information on the case, caseworkers then need to find suitable interpreters, and here the onus seems to lie on the caseworkers. The overall process of recruitment of interpreters for such cases was described as challenging, and caseworkers' answers suggest that little support is provided by their employer: "Well, you get the information that, apparently, we have a deaf person here. So far, that was already reported through the police, and then you go and start searching; how do I find such an interpreter?" (I2, 30).

There are no official guidelines on how to deal with such cases, so the caseworkers resort to different problem-solving solutions. Their answers suggest that, mostly, finding an interpreter is viewed as "tedious" (I8, 15), and involves

many phone calls: "So, you are on the phone like an idiot for five, six hours, until you find an interpreter" (I2, 36). Information is obtained from colleagues but also through interpreters themselves or deaf associations which seem to be considered valuable providers of information (see Trengereid Olsen 2019). Interpreters are contacted either through the central register of interpreters, which was mentioned above, or after an internet search, through personal contacts or also deaf associations. Several caseworkers report that they tried to obtain details on how to best conduct interviews with deaf applicants through staff of deaf associations or interpreters. Here they seem to rely strongly on interpreters to find an adequate solution, and interpreters' expertise appears to be valued and taken into consideration in their decisions, which is framed as a joint decision ("the two of us") in the example below:

> Well, there I really let Mr. [anonymised] explain to me what he thinks makes most sense and then *the two of us* came up with the solution that it would make most sense to use two interpreters. Does cost money, but if I had only taken Mr. [anonymised] then there was the danger that the two would not have been able to communicate, and then I need a new appointment, also costs money. (I3, 13; emphasis added)

4.1.3 Background knowledge

What has been said so far also suggests that (some) caseworkers have little previous knowledge about deafness, deaf cultures and deaf individuals' communicative means and strategies, or about working with SL or Deaf interpreters, which is also sometimes mirrored in the language they use. While some use generally accepted language (signs, signed language, signing) or even terms that reflect some knowledge about interpreting (relais interpreting), others still use historically antiquated terms which may be perceived as offensive and mirroring an ableist perspective (deaf-mute). This lack of knowledge was also confirmed by several caseworkers: "I also did not know then that [one] signed language does not equal [another] signed language" (I2, 38). This lack

of familiarity may serve as one possible explanation for why cases with deaf applicants are still remembered even after some time. To counter their lack of background knowledge, some caseworkers read up on the topic before taking a decision on the most appropriate strategies: "And yes, I first really had to read up on that a bit because I did not know that there are different signed languages like there are different countries. I always thought that there is one single" (I4, 23).

Some caseworkers also ask themselves in retrospect whether the setting they finally chose was the most adequate, suggesting that there is a degree of retrospective reflection of procedural strategies.

The interpreting situations that were finally employed in the cases the caseworkers described are mostly in line with the different options that were outlined above (see § 2.3): employing one interpreter (either spoken-language or SL), employing two interpreters (spoken-language and SL, or SL and Deaf interpreter, or spoken-language and family members, though this last option was mentioned only once) and, in addition, communication through lipreading and marked pronunciation or by means of writing. Finding an appropriate setup seems to be one of the areas where many caseworkers rely on the recommendations provided by interpreters or the staff of a deaf association.

4.2 Specific vulnerabilities and challenges

4.2.1 Issues of vulnerability

The fact that such procedures are viewed as challenging does not necessarily mean, however, that the applicants involved are seen as more vulnerable than others. The rather short answers I received on this point may serve as an indicator that vulnerability assessment with a focus on deaf applicants does not seem to be a matter the interviewees have thought about much: "Could well be. The idea has not yet come up with me" (I12, 47). When asked specifically, some, though not all, of the interviewed caseworkers maintain that cases with applicants with a hearing loss may involve an increased degree of individual vulnerability, or at least the need to "take a closer look" (I12, 45).

For one interviewee, identification of individual vulnerability is also linked to the systemic structures in an applicant's country of origin: "But what I can think of is, that in some countries where there are no state/ no functioning state structures, there might indeed be a big problem. With Russia and Turkey, I don't believe this is true" (I3, 94). And another interviewee points to the risk of, in his view, equalising disability with vulnerability: "I think that you also should not fall into the trap that you then really/ I don't know/ deaf-mute equals disabled, equals automatically vulnerable, or what, right? Well, I think you should not fall into that. He simply can't speak and simply doesn't hear anything" (I9, 32).

4.2.2 Emotionality and discourse control

Two interviewees also mention "emotionality," or a lack thereof, as a specific challenge. In the first case (see the quote below), the nonverbal cues, signs, and gestures used by the applicant apparently were difficult to pin down and perhaps baffling to the caseworker. And in the second case the same caseworker that had already pointed to unfamiliar visual cues as a hindrance for uncovering incoherence (see 4.1.1), again stresses that lacking emotions makes it more difficult for him to identify "contradictions" (I7, 60).

> And that was really interesting to observe because this lady in her excitement and in her anger or rage or whatever she had, started gesticulating that you really/ well, that happens in fast movements and everything flies, in all directions. You sit there slightly shocked. And if, I always say, please don't get me wrong, but if a Chechen or a Georgian does that during an interview [with the police], he sits there with his hands chained behind his back. He won't move one centimetre. That's the way it is. (I2, 38)

Identifying discrepancies and inconsistencies and following up with additional questions also has to do with discourse control, whereby caseworkers seek to ascertain whether questions are interpreted correctly and understood by the applicants, and whether answers are "plausible" (I3, 68) and coherent, in the sense that they provide a logical answer to questions and fit into the overall

narrative strand. Studies have shown that this apparently simple process of securing understanding is in fact far more complex and that it can be viewed as one of the pivotal challenges of asylum interviews (Pöllabauer 2023).

Some caseworkers also gave examples that suggest that, in these particular cases, applicants' language proficiency or communication skills made it more difficult for them to assess whether the applicant understood their questions: "It was a bit tedious because there were more clarifying questions, in fact very regularly, if asylum applicant and sign interpreter [sic] did not understand each other verbally, in inverted commas" (I3, 92).

Similarly, another caseworker describes the overall communication framework as being "reduced" (I6, 25), which, in his view, makes it more difficult to provide information to the applicants and obtain relevant information. Two caseworkers also gave specific examples of situations where they apparently tried to sound out, together with the interpreters, whether the chosen setup would work and how much information could, in fact, be exchanged. In one case, the applicant apparently used home signs and was accompanied by a family member (see the first example below), and in another case (see the second example below), the applicant relied on lipreading and the interpreter resorted to speaking very loudly and to pronouncing very clearly, which may not even be an effective strategy for deaf people who are used to lipreading. In this case, the SLI had more of a backup function and was then sent home, while the spoken-language interpreter continued speaking very loudly.

Working with teams of interpreters, including Deaf–SL interpreting teams, and cooperation between those teams were generally remarked upon positively: "Yes, at any rate, because when it was not recognised by the International Signed Language, then [anonymised] did it. Well, they really complemented each other!" (I7, 68).

4.2.3 Interviewing (technique) and trust

Interviewing techniques seem to be viewed as a challenge, and in this regard, clarification questions or the free-recall phase of an interview were described as particularly challenging:

Well, it was AWFULLY difficult because the sign interpreter [sic] again and again said, she doesn't understand that. Or you saw with the applicant: There was a communication problem. And then it was a matter of again and again repeating the question. Still easier, still clearer, what we want to know. It was tedious, complicated and, in that part, where it dealt with the reason why he fled his country, eh, we ultimately were happy that there were at least some answers that were understandable and based on which we could decide. (I12, 21)

One of the caseworkers also critically reflects on the potential limits of his interviewing techniques in such complex situations: "Well, I would not dare to interview a deaf person on a situation which was personally tragic, well, what do I know, let's say, individual persecution" (I10, 45).

Trust was also mentioned repeatedly, without being prompted through a specific question of mine and not necessarily as a challenge but more as a factor that is viewed as decisive for the outcome of an interview. Here again, the caseworkers place responsibility on the interpreter(s) for helping them to build and maintain a cooperative atmosphere: "There has to be some basic degree of trust between the interviewer, the interpreter, and the applicant, so that he can express himself freely and talk freely" (I11, 50).

Whether challenges, such as the ones mentioned, can ultimately be solved, and whether an interview goes well or not depends on a complex range of influential factors. Looking at the cases the caseworkers had handled, some were content with how these cases went and some not.[11] One caseworker, for instance, very positively claimed that "that [the interview] worked terrifically" (I7, 66), while another gave an example of a completely different experience: "Eh, that did not work at all for us with the sign interpreter *[sic]*. Well, they could not understand each other AT ALL! Not even in the most basic sense" (I10, 9).

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[11] Because of data protection, I do not have or cannot provide information on the outcomes of these interviews.

5. Discussion and conclusion

To answer the research questions outlined above and draw some general conclusions, my interviews with asylum caseworkers suggest that there are structural constraints, in the sense of a form of epistemic vulnerability (Määttä, Puumala & Ylikomi 2021), which will have an influence on both caseworkers' and interpreters' working routines and which may ultimately also have implications on how applicants perceive their interviewing situations.

To answer my first research question, which sought to explore how caseworkers perceive cases with deaf applicants, the results of my study suggest that interviews with deaf applicants are perceived as *special cases* by the caseworkers. Though they may potentially be viewed as a disturbance to their standard practices (Tipton 2016), such non-standard cases are, however, not necessarily viewed as negative by the caseworkers. On the contrary, most of the caseworkers seemed willing and committed to finding the best possible solutions for the specific cases they had had to deal with, even though little institutional support is provided to them, and cooperation with different stakeholders, also prominently including interpreters, is viewed as valuable and promoting, in certain cases, a specific "occupational interculture" (Tipton 2016, 436). There also seems to be at least some willingness to allow for an adequate degree of empathy and sensitiveness.

Generally, there are no institutionalised support structures in place, so caseworkers are forced to rely on their subjective perceptions and intuitive and ad hoc strategies, which make such cases complex and perhaps force the caseworkers to leave their institutional comfort zone. What seems to be particularly challenging and fraught with risk from the caseworkers' perspective are clarification questions and the free narrative phase of the interview. This is also an aspect that carries risks in terms of credibility, the validity of a decision and the overall outcome of an interview from an institutional viewpoint.

It also seems noteworthy that, perhaps not surprisingly, female caseworkers seem to be institutionally credited with higher empathetic communication skills, though research on gender differences in empathy reveals mixed results, depending on the methodology used, suggesting that "self-reports

may induce biases leading individuals to assume gender-role stereotypes" (Baez et al. 2017, 1).

With a view to the second research question, which sought to explain how caseworkers view their cooperation with interpreters and related challenges, my data suggest that due to their lack of knowledge about deafness and concomitant communication modes, they seem willing to place much trust in the interpreters to provide them with suitable information on possible communicative arrangements and on whether understanding is possible or not in concrete situations, even though they do not have much information on the interpreters' qualifications, educational background, and expertise. From a risk management perspective, this comes with a considerable degree of uncertainty, ambiguity, and error-proneness, potentially leaving the caseworkers professionally vulnerable.

The data at hand also suggest that, for some caseworkers, communication with deaf applicants still often seems to be influenced by an ableist deficit model, where deaf applicants are perceived to be lacking particular qualities in relation to able-bodied refugees, as revealed through both the wording used and the explanations given for specific cases. Communication in asylum proceedings is almost always shaped by intricate multidimensional power differentials among caseworkers and applicants, caseworkers and interpreters, and applicants and interpreters as the three main parties, and there might be other additional stakeholders involved. Despite a potential "veneer of benevolence" (Sheneman & Robinson 2021, 55) and empathy, caseworkers are still enmeshed in a system that is "informed by neoliberal managerialism" (Ioannidis, Dimou & Dadusc 2021, 3641). They are both "vectors of power and resistance" (2021, 3656) reproducing an institutional power structure despite the best of intentions and (disabled) refugees have little influence on this overall system.

The data at hand do not allow for an assessment of how the diverse setups that were described did in fact work and whether the situations and the related questioning strategies that were employed can, in fact, guarantee that the deaf applicants' narratives and the indexical load of their accounts are fully conveyed. The material does suggest, however, that caseworkers are willing to cooperate with the interpreters in these concrete situations and may even see

them as trustworthy counterparts within a larger team, at least temporarily and for a specific case. This is a topic that would merit more attention in a follow-up study.

The fact that caseworkers have little experience with cases involving deaf applicants and in working with SL or Deaf interpreters will also have repercussions on the routines of interpreters, who cannot expect the officials to know much about deafness and SL interpreting, perhaps requiring more on-the-spot user education. This may make them more vulnerable professionally, on the one hand, with perhaps an increased need to explain and perhaps safeguard their working modes and the limits of their professional role, which is one major finding that answers my third research question. On the other hand, however, the interviews suggest that caseworkers rely heavily on either interpreters or representatives of deaf associations in helping them find adequate communication solutions which can also be taken as a validation of interpreters' expertise.

The data also clearly suggest that there is a need for sensitisation towards special procedural guarantees for deaf applicants as a potentially more vulnerable group, along with the need for, ideally, interprofessional training on how to deal with such particular cases. Such sensitisation training should also pay attention to the contextualisation of the interprofessional cooperation between caseworkers, interpreters, and other participants in the sense of Pym's ethics of "contextualized human relations" (2000, 190 and above).

One limitation of this study is that it only presents the caseworkers' perspective, which perpetuates the perspective of those in positions of power, and in this respect it is also not clear whether the group of interviewees who agreed to participate in this study belongs to that faction among the entirety of caseworkers who are open and willing to deal with non-standard cases and are thus more open to trust in outside opinions and support. In addition, both the interpreters' and applicant's perspective could and should be explored. The data discussed here only allow speculation on how the setups discussed in this article actually work for deaf refugees and whether some may place them at an even greater disadvantage or perpetuate an (ableist) perspective that increases their vulnerabilities. Here, it would be desirable to also carry out interviews with deaf users of interpreters. In addition, interpreters' subjective

perceptions of applicants' vulnerabilities and their strategies for approaching these might be interesting, but also their views on cooperation with Deaf interpreter colleagues. Ideally, authentic discourse data, albeit difficult to access, could also provide more evidence on the factors that shape and influence interprofessional cooperation in such a complex setting and would allow an insight into concrete interpreting and communication strategies and also teamwork among interpreter teams in this field.

Since this study is based on only a small set of data and merely allows for a first glimpse into the tangled interactions in communicating with deaf applicants in an asylum context, it remains to be hoped that other studies and different methodological approaches will help to shed more light onto this field, which, while it might centre on a minority group among refugees, rightfully merits attention.

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