

Language mediators' support for refugees at border crossing points: enhancing societal tools for sustainable communication in multicultural communities of Austria, Germany and Russia

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Abstract

The contemporary international situation is characterized by the humanitarian crisis and a great wave of refugees. The border crossing point of a host country separates the refugees' former life full of suffering and pain and the expectations of a new peaceful life. Here a language mediator is considered like a person who can show the refugee the way to a new life. The issue of the language mediation to refugees at border points is the subject matter of this paper. The main purpose of the research is to study the practical experience of different countries in the provision of the language mediation assistance to refugees. The research papers concerning various aspects of the refugees' migration, the UN documents and the various materials on the topic and the practical experience of Austria, the Federal Republic of Germany and the Russian Federation are examined. The government departments in the countries under study that are responsible for the work and assistance to refugees are stated. The professional activity of a language mediator is viewed from various angles. In the framework of the research a survey on the language mediation activity, the refugee obstacles at border crossing points and the opinions of the language mediators from Austria, Germany and Russia was held. The findings of the survey were generalized and the recommendations to improve the translators/interpreters activity were made. The research is implemented within the framework of the RUDN university participation in the Russia-wide 5-100 project.

Keywords: *language mediation, refugee status, border-crossing point, host country, migration policy*

Introduction

One of the characteristics of the contemporary world is a refugee crisis. The contemporary world statistics indicates 22.5 million people as refugees (that are also called forced displaced or stateless people) and their quantity is constantly increasing (Center for International Governance Innovation, 2017). Over half of these people are under the age of 18 (Figures at a Glance, 2017).

Nowadays each European country faces the problem of refugee migration and consequently has the legislative framework that regulates the adaptation of a refugee in the new country of

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residence. The first step to this adaptation is realized at the border crossing points. Here a person seeking for a status of a refugee has to pass an oral interview, to fill in the mandatory documents for receiving a refugee status. The interview and the documents are aimed at setting the legal priorities, on the one hand, and restrictions, on the other hand, for certain categories of people.

At a border crossing point people are anxious, worried and sometimes even depressed they have left their motherlands and do not know what expects them in the new country. They need the assistance of the officials. Besides the psychological depression, the people who just overcame the way full of danger and risks to their lives and to the lives of their families can face some language problems. At this moment, the role of a language mediator is crucial.

Each country has a certain system of interrelated legal norms and language support provided to refugees at border crossing points. Nowadays, when the refugee crisis seized almost all European countries, it is very important to share the national experience and to study the positive practice of each country concerning the language mediation assistance to refugees at border points.

The importance of these issue for the international environment determines the topicality of the further research.

The purposes of the current research are:

First, to explore the practice of the language mediation assistance provided to refugees in Germany and Austria, on the one hand, and in the Russian Federation, on the other hand;

Second, to hold a survey among the language mediators working with refugees at border points and compare the findings of the survey;

Third, to develop the recommendations to language mediators working with the refugees at the border points.

The output of the research confirms the importance of international collaboration to implement the language mediation assistance to refugees at border points.

Literature Review

The issues connected with the refugees' problems in the countries that we focus on cause much interest of the researchers.

Many papers suggest the historical review of the events connected with the refugee migration in Austria, Germany (Keyserlingk, 2009) and Russia (Gatrell & Nivet, 2014) from the end of the

XIX century up to the Great War in 1914. Historical and comparative analysis of the legislation concerning social rights and social assistance to refugees and migrants in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK was carried out by Anja Eleveld (2014). The main wave of the forced migrants and stateless people in Russia is related to the collapse of the Soviet Union. At that time more than 3 million Russian people were persecuted for their national origin or inability to speak the national language of the new independent countries. In some places, Russian people were forced to leave their homes and flee to their historical motherland to save their lives and children being under the risk to suffer in the armed conflicts (Kosygina, 2018). Another wave of refugees was caused by the national conflict and by military actions in Ukraine (Gulina, 2015; Mukomel, 2017).

The evolution of the concept “refugee”, the laws connected with the changes of the refugee status after the World War II were considered by Giorgio Grappi (2010).

The refugees in Germany are characterized by their diversity. This fact can be explained by their various background and the wave of refugee migration that brought the forced displaced to Europe. The reasons of why some refugees can and are eager to be integrated into the local society whereas the others are reluctant to any integration are described by Olaf J. de Groot and Lutz Sager (2010). German policy aimed at the refugees’ integration requires much efforts and costs on the part of the authorities and public society. There are cases when migrants oppose the rules of social conduct and life regulations that new for them (Burmester, 2018). In the last years there are more and more people that hesitate whether “welcome and integration” German policy can do harm to German culture, well-being and safety (Funk, 2016).

The refugees’ diversity results from their different national origin, religious views and cultural habits. These features can explain the inequality of the refugees in social spheres (Fauser et al., 2012).

There is a common opinion that most refugees in Austria and Germany are from Turkey, they make the majority of Muslims in these countries and play an essential role in the political life. The adherence of the Turks to the national cultural traditions and customs annoys the citizens of Austria and Germany. Though the second and the third generations of the refugees have already been brought in these European countries, they are still considered as “foreign workers” and are expected to go back home. The problem is that the young Turks do not go home and assume the countries that hosted their grandparents and parents as their motherland (Koc, 2009).

Since the XX century the refugees' disappointment is used by the local politicians for their political campaigns. In addition, this tendency is becoming more and more evident (Kohnert, 1993). The refugee crises of the last decade is so huge that political parties in Austria think of the approaches how to regulate and cope with the influx of refugees to the country. Two approaches are debated: first, to build a "legal wall" and decrease the number of asylum applicants; and second, to keep the door to the country "slightly ajar". In fact, both approaches try to cope with the fear of the nation and to protect Austria and its citizens from the refugee threat (Rheindorf & Wodak, 2018).

In several years a new generation of people was born in Germany. However, these people not being integrated into the national environment represent the second generation of refugees which still depends on the public and social assistance in Germany (Fertig & Schmidt, 2001).

An opposite standpoint also exists: young refugees intend to get good education, appropriate work and be successful in a host country. The refugees from different countries have a unique experience in their adaptation to a new life (Cohen, 2007; Tarman & Gürel, 2017). Special attention of the German authorities is drawn to the unaccompanied minor refugees (Zalewski, 2017; Atabekova, 2017). A long-standing conflict in Syria caused a new wave of many unaccompanied Syrian children have become refugees; they suffer both psychologically and physically. The latest results show that the majority of the minors became orphans and left Syria for other countries (Ahsan, 2018).

Fazila Bhimji (2016) studies the ways that the refugees claim for the change of their status in Germany. As having arrived from such countries as Italy, Spain or Hungary the refugees can be deported there back as their fingerprints were first taken in these countries. This legal regulation is set by the EU law.

Ulrike Hamann and Serhat Karakayali (2016) focus on the ability of the German citizens and the society in general to incorporate another culture and acknowledge the current society as a "society of immigration".

It is evident that the issue of refugees and refugee migration as well as the influence of this phenomenon on the national situation inside the country is viewed from different angles. However, very often the refugees face many problems in understanding the language of the host country starting from the very first moments after they cross the border line of a foreign country. The literature review indicates that only a few research papers discuss the refugees' challenges

related to the linguistic issues and translation/interpreting service for refugees (Atabekova et al., 2017; Díez, 2011; Gibb & Good, 2014; Jones & Jill, 1998; Sijilmassi, 2017). The papers mentioned above focus on various issues of the translation/interpreting to help refugees: health care, search of living accommodation, professional training, employment etc. However, no attempts were made to analyze the experience of the language mediators' assistance to refugees at border points i.e. at the first minutes on the territory of a foreign country when they reached their destination after a long trip full of risk and danger.

The lack of the study on this issue makes this research topical.

Materials and Methods

The study consisted of several stages: (1) the examination of the documents clarifying the role of the language mediators in their assistance to refugees especially at boarder points; (2) the analysis of the national departments' activity of the countries under study in their work with refugees; (3) the survey of the language mediators who had the experience of practical work with refugees; (4) the analysis and generalization of the experiment output. Apparently, such research design can assist to realize the positive practices and the obstacles in the language mediators' work with refugees.

One of the main documents regulating the assistance to refugees in the modern world is the "Guidelines on International Protection No. 11: Prima Facie Recognition of Refugee Status" by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The Guidelines determine the refugee status and asylum procedures and are mandatory for interpreting/translation services for refugees in all countries (Handbook and Guidelines on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status, 2011).

The document indicates the main function of an interpreter as a language mediator, and specifies some recommendations to implement professional activity. A language mediator must behave in a professional way following the ethical rules of conduct. He/she should be aware of the purpose and content of the work both in relation to the official structure, and in relation to the individual. The mediators should be able to change the algorithm of the actions in different situations (Handbook and Guidelines on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status, 2011).

The document determines the main aspects of the language mediators 'activity:

- translation and interpreting the refugees' personal data;

- translation and interpreting during the interview with the applicant for the refugee status;
- translation and interpreting in course of monitoring the situation when the information about the person applying for the refugee status is collected;
- translation and interpreting in course of the communication of the medical staff with the person applying for the refugee status;
- translation and interpreting in course of obtaining confidential information on the identification of the persons subjected to all kinds of violence.

Communicating with the applicants for the refugee status and the representatives of the migration service, police and other formal bodies a language mediator should be impartial and stick to the neutral position. Sometimes it is difficult to achieve the ethical and psychological independence as a language mediator could be influenced by the officials (migration service, police officers etc.), on the one hand, and by the refugees who try to conceal the important information and provide false information instead, on the other hand.

Among the destructive factors that can make effect on the language mediator activity the following issues can be identified, first, former refugees can work as language mediators and consequently they can feel some sympathy to the former compatriots. Second, due to the hard psychological working conditions the concentration and the quality of translation/interpreting of a language mediator can fade during the day. Sometimes a language mediator does not feel safe.

The "Handbook and Guidelines on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status" (2011) clarifies many various aspects of the language mediators' role in their work with refugees e.g. the prohibition to provide any sociological, anthropological or historical information received in the personal communication with refugees. It also touches upon such issues as the evaluation of memory resources; the relationship of such concepts as "perception" and "awareness"; the ways of keeping notes and using symbols; the role of the "cultural component" in the translation/interpreting; the mandatory awareness of legal and medical vocabulary etc. This document contains the detailed information on the translator/ interpreter's activity and can be considered as a corner stone in the language mediators' setting.

The provisions of the Handbook are valid for all national language mediation services. Nevertheless, each country has some specific features in language mediation service.

The issues of the refugee migration are examined and settled by various national bodies. In Austria they are the Ministry of Home Affairs/ Federal Ministry of the Interior/

Bundesministerium für Inneres (<http://www.bmi.gv.at>) and Federal Office for Foreigners and Asylum/ Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl (<http://www.bfa.gv.at>). In Germany these bodies are Federal Office for Migration and Refugees/Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (<https://www.bamf.de/DE/Startseite/startseite-node.html>) and The Federal Agency for Civic Education/Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (<https://www.bpb.de>).

In Russia such government bodies as the Main Office for Migration of the Ministry of Home Affairs of Russia/ Glavnoye Upravleniye po Voprosam Migratsii MVD Rossii (<https://губвм.мвд.рф>) and Federal Migration Service/Federal'naya migratsionnaya sluzhba (<http://government.ru/en/department/247/events/>) implement and control all issues connected with the refugee migration.

The legal support of the refugees in Russia is realized according to the Federal Law on the Citizenship of the Russian Federation (Federal Law of the Russian Federation “On the Citizenship of the Russian Federation with Amendments” of 31.05.2002 N 62-FZ); Federal Law on the Refugees (Federal Law of the Russian Federation “On the Refugees” of 19.02.1993 N 4528-1 art. 12); Federal Law on the Forced Migrants (Federal Law of the Russian Federation "On the Forced Migrants" of 19.02.1993 N 4530-1 art. 1).

Clarifying many issues connected with the refugees and their duties, social support and their life on the territory of the Russian Federation, no information about the language mediation service to the refugees in general and in the Russian boarding points in particular is found.

A language mediator can also assist a refugee in searching the important information (e.g. the samples of the documents to be submitted and their translations in a foreign language) at web resources of the appropriate government departments that are responsible for the refugee support (Nikolaeva & Pak, 2017). All sites of the national bodies give information in the national language Russian or German and in English. Moreover, the departments of Germany provide the information in the Arabic and Turkish languages.

In Germany the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees developed a document the "Code of Conduct for the Specialist Involved in Interpreting and Translating Activity with Refugees" dated 09.06.2017 (Verhaltenskodex für Sprachmittler beim Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2017). The document is of crucial importance as the Office employs translators and interpreters without any experience and special skills to deal with refugees. The Code of Conduct outlines the goals and tasks of translators/interpreters (as language mediators) in the

situations when refugees are at the border points, when they fill in the documents for the refugee status and during an interview when they apply for the refugee status. The Code of Conduct also regulates the interpersonal contacts of translators/interpreters and the cases when the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Specialist Involved in Interpreting and Translating Activity with Refugees are breached (Verhaltenskodex für Sprachmittler beim Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2017).

"Procedure for granting asylum to refugees (review of step-by-step actions and legal documents" (Ablauf des deutschen Asylverfahrens, 2016) published by Federal Office for Migration and Refugees/Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge clarifies the stages where a language mediator can be involved:

- the registration and submission of the documents for the refugee status;
- the verification of the data provided;
- an interview etc. (Ablauf des deutschen Asylverfahrens, 2016).

In Austria the Federal Office for Foreigners and Asylum/ Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl worked out the "Recommendations on the effective activity of translators/interpreters" (April 2017) (Asylverfahren, 2015). This document specifies the requirements of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees to the universal and professional qualities of the "language mediators" who provide the language mediation assistance and support to refugees. Special attention is paid to the role of an interpreter during the interview on applying for the refugee status. The outcome of the interview very often depends on the ability of an interpreter to convey the information received from an applicant adequately. The applicant is often under stress and cannot always answer the questions of the interviewers reasonably.

Taking into consideration the responsibility of translators/interpreters and the psychological component of this responsibility, the Austrian Ministry of Home Affairs/ Federal Ministry of the Interior/ Bundesministerium für Inneres and the UN Refugee Agency initiated a pilot project "QUADA" (Qualitativvolles Dolmetschen im Asylverfahren, 2015) and a training course for interpreters aimed at:

- simulating the algorithm of the actions of translators/interpreters in various situations;
- making the information collected and analyzed available to all language mediators involved in the work with refugees;
- creating a permanent "platform" for coordinating the cooperation and collaboration of

various departments involved in the work with refugees (Trainingshandbuch für DolmetscherInnen im Asylverfahren, 2015).

Studying the problems of language mediators at border points, it was useful to learn the opinion of the translators and interpreters working with the refugees at border crossing points. For this purpose, the questionnaire was used. It included 10 issues most of them were open-ended:

1. Are you aware of the refugee problems? If yes, please specify.
2. Did you work with refugees at border crossing points? Yes, no
3. Do you think that the refugees at the border crossing points were familiar with the legal documents of the national migration service?
4. What problems did the refugees mention at border crossing points?
5. Did you work as a language mediator at border crossing points? Yes, no
6. Did you provide any kind of translation/interpreting assistance to refugees at border crossing points? If yes, what kind of assistance?
7. Was your assistance effective? Why do you think so?
8. Are you a professional a) translator/interpreter b) an expert in another area (what)? What is your practical experience in this profession?
9. Did you encounter any professional difficulties in your work with refugees at border crossing points? If yes, please, indicate 2-3 examples.
10. What other translation/interpreting services are necessary for refugees at border crossing points?

The survey was held on line in the professional community of a social network in the countries under study.

Results and Discussion

The current study showed that all countries under study have legal regulations of the issues concerning migrants though the scope of problems covered by the national legislation on the migrants' problems differs in various countries. Moreover, each country has special departments that concentrate on the challenges caused by the migration crisis in the contemporary international environment. However, the language mediators working with migrants face different obstacles depending on the country of their professional activity.

As most of the issues of the survey did not assumed a brief answer, the findings of the

questionnaire were discussed in different ways. Some findings were presented in the table; the others need to be explained in a more extended way. The cultural and national differences made an impact on the way the participants of the survey responded, so the data of the survey are shown according to the country of the mediators' professional activity.

Moreover, due to its geographical position the Russian Federation is far from the main routes of refugees' migrants, so the Russian participants of the survey shared their experience of mediation activity on the territory of Greece and other countries where they worked as the members of Non-profit organization "Translators Without Borders" (office in Moscow).

Table 1

The Experience of Language Mediators from Austria, Germany and Russia in the work with refugees at border points

	Mediators from Austria and Germany	Mediators from Russia
1. The awareness of refugee problems	100% - positive	60% - negative 40% - positive
2. Mediators working with refugees at border points	100% - negative	80% - negative 20% - positive
3. The refugees' awareness of national legal documents	100% -	90% - negative 10% - positive
4. The refugees' problems at border points	The difficulties in communication and comprehension	Misunderstanding the representatives of the humanitarian funds, the lack of the appropriate knowledge of the legal procedures of the refugee status documents submission, poor living conditions in the refugee camps
5. The experience as a language mediator at border points	100% no experience	60% - % no experience 40% - some experience
6. The mediation assistance to refugees at border points	100% no assistance	80% - no assistance 20% - some assistance
7. The efficacy of the assistance	100% did not answer	10% - - are not sure 10% - positive
8. The professional training and working experience	100% - professional training as a translator/interpreter The average practical experience is more than 3 years	60% - professional training is not connected with translation or interpreting The practical experience is more than 5 years.
9. Professional problems in the work with refugees at border points	100% did not answer	60% - did not answer 40% - some problems
10. Other language mediation services	100% negative	60% - negative 40% - positive

As the survey implied the extended replies to some questions, a more detailed analysis of the findings can be realized.

The language mediators in Germany and Austria as well as the migration service officers and lawyers usually take part in special sessions and meetings where the up-to-date information on the refugees from the border points is discussed and examined. During these meetings, the language mediators (100%) learn about the problems of the refugees.

60% of the Russian language mediators do not know anything about the refugee obstacles, whereas 40% come to the conclusion about the refugee problems from their own practical experience. The issues most frequently mentioned include the changes of the personal data in the original documents, the wrong translation or transliteration of the personal data, the illegal border crossing, the illegal attempt to leave the host country, the documents forgery, the reluctance to renew the documents etc.

The language mediators from Austria and Germany who participated in the survey reported that they worked with the refugees not at the border points but at the sites of temporary or permanent residence in cities and rural areas. The Russian respondents had an experience of communicating with the refugees who arrived in Greek islands.

All respondents from Austria and Germany are sure that the refugees arriving to the host country are not aware of the national legislation and migration law.

The majority of their Russian counterparts (90%) agree with this point of view, though 10% hesitate about it and assume that if the refugee know the language of the host country he/she can have at least a vague idea of some migration rules or other national laws.

All respondents from Austria and Germany and 60% of the Russian respondents never worked as language mediators at the border points. Consequently, the West European mediators and 80% Russian mediators (20% more than in the previous issue) could not provide any translation or interpreting assistance to refugees at border points. 20% of the Russian mediators made translations of the documents and trained some refugees as interpreters.

Apparently, those language mediators that respondent negatively in the previous issue gave no reply to this item. One-half of the Russian mediators providing assistance to refugees at border points are sure that they were helpful and their work was quite effective.

All respondents from the EU countries under study have professional training as interpreters

and/or translators. Their practical experience is quite modest (about 3- years). 60% of the Russian respondents got their professional education as managers, economists, lawyers, psychologists, the other 40% were trained as interpreters and/or translators. The practical experience of the Russian respondents ranges from 6 to 14 years.

The language mediators from Austria and Germany could not respond to items 9 and 10. The Russian respondents stated that the main problem of the language mediator at a border point is the lack of special professional training including not only the training as a translator and/or interpreter, but psychological training and the basic and general psychiatric training as people arriving at the border point can be depressed and be in poor psychiatric condition. Moreover, a language mediator should be aware of the cultural and national traditions and customs of the refugee migrants. In such circumstances, a language mediator as a person who speaks the language of a refugee is considered as the only one who can support and assist the refugee in an unknown place.

As far as the other services at border crossing points are concerned, the legal assistance is very important as a refugee should be clarified the rights and duties of the host country.

Conclusion

As the international situation remains very tense, the number of refugees is constantly growing. The governments of all developed countries and the international organizations work out the measures to support the forced displaced or stateless people, to socialize them, to provide their families with diverse assistance.

Various issues concerning the refugees and their problems are investigated by the researchers. Still there are some cases and situations that are not studied yet. Among such issues is the language mediation assistance to refugees at border points. Each country has both the theoretical and practical experiences in this area.

The aim of this paper was to examine the official information on some aspects of the refugee migration problem and the language mediation assistance provided to refugees in border points in Austria, Germany and Russia. Apparently, the assistance of a language mediator is essential when the application of a refugee status is submitted to the migration service; when the interviews in the process of processing documents for refugee status are held; when the necessary information on various issues concerning the refugees should be searched at on line

resources and sites of the national migration departments

The main rules of a translator/ interpreter are clarified in the UN documents. Nevertheless, the particular regulations of the activities and responsibilities of language mediators (translators and interpreters) should be developed for various situations including the language mediation assistance at border points.

The international collaboration of the language mediators working with refugees might be useful and fruitful for those who are involved in the language mediation activity at border points. Various workshops and practical conferences can provide the language mediators with positive practical experience and make their assistance to refugees more efficient and effective.

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