

Interpreters Taken Hostage

Official interpreters in the Danish asylum system: simply going through the motions?

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When fleeing war or seeking a future, many asylum-seekers -whether they be refugees or simply immigrants- make up dud narratives so as to fit into the systems we offer them. Of course they do. And so, just as naturally, the immigration authorities are on the look-out for incoherences, chinks and crevices in the stories they are being told.

However, the interpreters are taken hostage by a barely veiled anti-asylum agenda when they are prevented from carrying out their task properly, and their inevitable occasional mis-translations are found to differ from those in the original "interview" (nothing like euphemisms to gloss over power-wielding).

The hindrances for a job well done are many: Most interpreters aren't trained, none of them receive the case documents before or even during the task at hand, there is no time or room to check for understanding, and many asylum-seekers are only given interpreters in languages of which they only master a pidgin version. The interpreter and the asylum-seeker therefore do not really speak the same language, the interpreter may be any bilingual person that has mysteriously made it onto the list of official interpreters, and the problem is not a slight one: any "changes of story" (even if they might just be changes of translator) are grounds for not granting asylum. It looks like tools of a hidden political agenda, although it *could* of course simply be down to downright ignorance, and absolute indifference amongst the people in charge. It certainly is in accordance with what a majority of Danes seem to want, and in that sense it is democratic in spirit, but still unprofessional, unlawful and amoral.

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