"The Ones That We Don't Find" – Approaching Languages of Limited Diffusion in Interpreting. Entrance Assessment in the Light of Non-Professional Interpreting Practice

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Abstract: This paper proposes an assessment approach to support trainers in addressing language testing in interpreting training for speakers of languages of limited diffusion (LLDs). The proposed approach is informed by the theoretical underpinnings of entrance testing in interpreting studies (IS) but equally considers the contextual constraints of testing environments, in our case common challenges of interpreting in a reception context, including non-professional interpreting. These latter challenges were reported during interviews with reception support organisations as part of the EU-WEBPSI project, which aims to improve interpreting capacity in reception contexts for speakers of LLDs and turns away from the generalised practice of non-professional interpreting common in the field. Through transnational collaboration of academic, professional, and institutional stakeholders, the project developed a web platform for video-mediated interpreting (VMI), devised train-the-trainer learning modules, and recruited, tested, and trained LLD speakers for interpreting in the reception context. The approach we present forms part of these concerted efforts to address the lack of research-based LLD interpreting (training) and support its practice.

Keywords: Languages of limited diffusion (LLDs); entrance assessment approach; interpreting training; reception and asylum contexts; non-professional interpreting.

1. Introduction

Migrants and refugees often face dire realities and challenges, not only in their host countries but also in transit along migration routes. They may experience difficulties such as threats to their safety and well-being, human-rights violations, precarious living situations, and lack of resources, such as limited access to healthcare or education, emotional and post-traumatic stress, and limited job opportunities (UNHCR 2024). One aspect of this that can be easily overlooked is the role language plays in guaranteeing appropriate access to services and support, as information may not be available without understanding a prevailing language or offering proper language assistance, whether in the form of multilingual information or via interpreters. These offers are often scarce in public services, however, and, even if available, interpreters may not always be properly trained for this task (Pöllabauer 2023a). This issue is even more pressing when it comes to speakers of languages of limited or lesser diffusion (LLDs), as these languages generally tend to be underrepresented in terms of available and qualified interpreters (Gentile 1993; Mikkelson 1999; Straker and Watts 2003; Singureanu *et al*. 2023; González Figueroa and Pöllabauer 2025), often prompting organisations to resort to non-professional (see Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva 2012; Antonini *et al*. 2017; Grbić and Kujamäki 2018) interpreting as the most convenient avenue of communication. We use the term LLDs here as a construct referring to languages with relatively low numbers of speakers in a designated area at a given moment in time. What is considered an LLD is, thus, contextually determined, and any language has the potential to qualify as an LLD (Salaets *et al*. 2016a, 2016b). Organisations often face difficulties in finding trained interpreters for LLDs, and this is intensified by the fluctuant nature of LLDs and divergent linguistic needs, which make it difficult to pinpoint demand (Singureanu *et al*. 2023).

Interpreting in an asylum and reception context, which is the background to our study, is affected by limitations: a lack of (qualified) interpreters, as mentioned; little specific training for interpreters (Pöllabauer 2023b), which may result in inadequate interpreting quality (Gómez Díez 2010); and problems in credibility assessment (Hedayat *et al*. 2023) as well as little awareness of the particular needs of more vulnerable applicant groups, such as minors (Keselman *et al*. 2010), SOGI (Jacobs and Maryns 2023; Sourdille and Pöllabauer forthcoming), or deaf applicants (Pöllabauer 2024), to name but a few specific examples. With much literature in interpreting studies (IS) dedicated to strengthening professionalisation through the training and educating of future practitioners, this appears to be lacking when it comes to research on interpreting for LLDs, both in general and particularly in an asylum and reception context. This lack impacts any efforts to support research-based instruction and, more significantly, diminishes the role of selection of LLD speakers in strengthening interpreting capacity in LLDs.

Selecting trainees for training constitutes a central element of an interpreting training or educational programme. At its core, the entrance selection or assessment serves to identify suitable applicants, who are to be tested for their aptitude and readiness to undergo and successfully complete training (see Gerver *et al*. 1989; Arjona-Tseng 1993; Moser-Mercer 1994; Roberts 2000; Campbell and Hale 2003; Sawyer 2004; Angelelli 2007; Russo 2011; Shang *et al*. 2023; Li 2024; for a recent overview, see Liu and Liu 2024). With different types of programmes preparing interpreters across highly divergent learning environments (see Mellinger 2021; Stern and Liu 2019; Amato and Mack 2022), the diagnostic potential of an entrance examination, then, presents itself as a crucial link between training philosophy, educational goals, contextual needs, and available resources. In interpreting, language testing schemes need to be effective and

informative to establish candidates' fundamental skills, namely, the use of more than one language in a cross-linguistic situation to achieve communication.

Considering the above-mentioned circumstances characterising many training initiatives and in regard to the testing of LLD speakers, instructors might benefit from a nuanced understanding of how to carry out language testing, especially where established practices might not appropriately account for all working languages of an applicant, for example for speakers with informally acquired language skills in one of their languages or for speakers from linguistic communities with stronger oral traditions. Assessing potential trainees, then, needs to take into account differences in applicant profiles, degrees of literacy, and linguistic repertoires, as well as limited written traditions of languages or lack of standard varieties and also the participants' translanguaging practices with specific testing schemes (Penney and Sammons 1997; Mikkelson 1999; Hlavac *et al.* 2012; Skaaden and Wadensjö 2014). While in some cases LLD training may only be affected by one or two of the above issues, the assessment scheme we propose here specifically addresses those situations where all of these issues are likely to apply, such as when speakers have highly heterogeneous profiles, divergent literacy levels, or linguistic repertoires.

The assessment approach developed within the EU-WEBPSI project [1] relies on previous considerations for entrance assessment in IS and empirical insights from the institutional fields participating in the project: asylum and reception support organisations. Our overall approach was community based and participatory and thus falls under a community action research paradigm (see also section 4). In what follows, we first review approaches to trainee selection reported across different instructional programmes in interpreting training, particularly focusing on their characteristics and merit for LLD interpreting. We then move on to empirical insights into LLD interpreting from asylum and reception support organisations, which were gathered through an interview study, and use these results to outline our entrance assessment approach for LLD speakers. In this way, we seek to enhance quality interpreting practices by supporting assessment for training LLD speakers, thus offering non-professional interpreters the chance to (re)valorise their linguistic resources through training. While our contextual focus in this paper lies on the asylum and reception context, with our assessment approach, we also address the scarcity of open-access material for trainers and providers of interpreting training and hope our discussion reaches other settings where interpreting for LLDs is required.

2. LLD interpreting: Training and entrance assessment

In past and present instances where specialised (often short-term) training courses for LLD interpreting have appeared around the world (see Sammons 1993; Mikkelson 1999; Hlavac *et al*. 2012; Hale and Ozolins 2014; Blasco Mayor 2020), they are marked by limited availability and accessibility of both language-specific materials and qualified educators. In response to the scarcity in resources, training initiatives often opt for language-generic courses which target many non-Western languages at once (see Lai and Mulayim 2010, 2013; Gany *et al*. 2017). To make trainers more able to address the lack of resources in LLD interpreting, particularly during the screening and selection of applicants, information on assessing LLDs needs to be included, as well as guidelines and instructions for selecting basic material, especially for language testing.

[1] See https://www.webpsi.eu/

As research shows, when establishing skills and competence profiles prior to programme commencement, training providers across different learning environments focus on candidates' scholastic records, previous (work) experiences, language knowledge, topical understanding, and motivation for training (see Timarová and Ungoed-Thomas 2008; Holmes 2020; Pöllabauer *et al.* 2024). Thus, in language testing, the task of the evaluators is to ascertain a candidate's linguistic skills in a programme's instructional language and other working languages, including LLDs. In some cases, it might prove difficult, or even impossible, to rely on pre-established assessment practices to test an applicant's proficiency in LLD(s) (see Straker and Watts 2003; Lai and Mulayim 2010). Choosing one or another of the available alternative means requires a grounded understanding of the potential results of a specific test method. In interpreting training and practice, a testing method is most likely to be chosen if it has the capacity to assess a candidate's employment of linguistic and communicative skill sets appropriate to a conversation (see Skaaden and Wadensjö 2014). To gain an in-depth understanding of available methods, we can turn to the literature on this subject. Several studies report on programmes' testing means in a variety of (non-dominant) languages and include feasibility aspects which inform the choice. Skaaden (2013, see also 2016), for example, details a method of performance testing in a one-year training course in Norway where external examiners proficient in a language(s) other than Norwegian assess candidates' performance in both working languages. In Pederson (2016), the presented assessment of applicants' language(s) other than Greenlandic consists of in-person and over-the-phone interviews to cope with time and financial constraints in smaller interpreting education programmes. An example of a more indirect means of eliciting a candidate's linguistic skill set is provided by Hlavac *et al*. (2012: 22). They report the use of a self-directed questionnaire to screen for applicants' competences in languages other than English, specifying it as an essential component, especially in cases where systematic testing in both languages is not feasible. An idea suited to testing larger numbers of students can be found with Valero-Garcés and Socarrás-Estrada (2012), who focus on language labs to test students' linguistic competence between programme transfers (e.g. from a BA to an MA). This procedure, however, while important for its feasibility aspect, allows for neither the assessment of interpreting performance nor that of interactional management skills, as the authors themselves highlight.

Looking at the existing case studies of LLD training programmes, we see that some opted for testing interpreting skills by way of a written assignment and oral test (Sammons 1993), others focused on availability and literacy (Mikkelson 1999) or on official language tests (Hale and Ozolins 2014), and others had few requirements besides general language competency, appropriate interpersonal skills and attitudes, and cultural and contextual knowledge (Blasco Mayor 2020). No common consensus seems to exist thus far on what currently constitute best practices in language testing for entrance purposes. Furthermore, there is no established framework or set of materials to carry out testing or assess the thoroughness of the assessment procedures employed, neither for dominant languages nor for LLDs or non-professional interpreting. Concrete testing procedures hinge on contextual affordances. To gain an adequate understanding of the contextual parameters to be factored in when assessing applicants, particularly in institutionalised asylum and reception support, we next examine the practical approaches towards LLD interpreting in place at three different reception organisations (see section 3). These empirical insights provide an additional layer to the challenges documented in the literature and allow us to further develop a flexible and scalable collection of resources for entrance testing. In turn, this collection can be employed by support organisations

(and others) to find candidates for training in reception contexts and (it is to be hoped) elsewhere.

3. Empirical insights from the EU-WEBPSI project

The data we draw on were collected within the EU-WEPSI project, which has aimed to support collaboration between academic and non-academic partners to foster interpreting capacity for the reception context, which is often carried out by non-professional interpreters, by training LLD speakers in video-mediated interpreting (VMI). Within the project, an online portal was developed with an integrated function to provide video-mediated interpreting and as a platform to house a repository of train-the-trainer material. The didactic material comprises eight modules that provide teachers and trainers with theoretical input, practical exercises, and hands-on materials in training sessions for LLD speakers when preparing them for interpreting assignments in reception contexts.[2]

The project aimed to combine the valuable experience of social partners and stakeholders active in the field, such as interpreter providers or reception authorities, with academic knowledge of public service interpreting (PSI), video-mediated interpreting, and LLDs.[3] This collaboration between academic and non-academic partners merges the "supply" and "demand" sides of interpreting, thereby broadening LLD interpreters' provision across several areas relating to reception and basic services, for example housing and employment. To do this, the project provides interpreter training in LLDs, yielding trained interpreters who will then be able to provide interpreting through a transnational VMI platform. This platform, developed as a key part of the project, enables inter-country collaboration of public service interpreters in reception contexts, including interpreting for basic services such as housing, food, healthcare, legal counselling, and education for minors.[4]

3.1. Approach to data collection and analysis

Within the project, semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees of three different reception organisations located in Belgium, France, and Greece during February and March 2023 (see Table 1). The interviews took place online (via Teams) and were based on an interview protocol that was drafted by the academic project partners and included questions about the organisation of interpreting practices, VMI, and LLD needs. The interview partners (one interview partner from Organisation A [OA], three from Organisation B [OB], and one from Organisation C [OC]) work as regular staff (administrative, reporting, training, certification) for the reception organisations that are partners in the EU-WEPSI project. The interview partners' relationship with the interpreters working for their organisations depends on the circumstances; some are staff interpreters, and others are freelancers or agency-provided (also see below). The interviews were audio-recorded, and the Teams ASR transcript was post-edited before data coding. The interview partners received both the transcripts and a summarised report of the content of the interviews, which was then reviewed by the interview partners to

[2] The eight modules developed in EU-WEBPSI project cover the following areas: (1) entrance assessment, (2) basic interpreting techniques, (3) ethics, (4) the public service domain, (5) specificities of VMI interpreting, (6) specificities of training interpreters in LLD, (7) organising certification tests, (8) interprofessional training on working with VMI interpreters.

[3] The project consortium includes partners from the interpreting, reception, and university sectors. For more information, see the EU-WEBPSI website link (see footnote 1).

[4] See https://portal.webpsi.eu/en

ensure correctness and anonymity. Table 1 provides information on the dates and length of the interviews.[5]

Table 1. Overview of interviews.

Interview	Organisation Interviewees	Duration	Date
Organisation A (OA)	1	2:57:41	14.02.2023
Organisation B (OB)	3	1:49:53	07.03.2023
Organisation C (OC)	1	2:11:38	09.03.2023

Our approach to data analysis corresponds to the type of qualitative content analysis outlined by Kuckartz and Rädiker (2023), which combines theory-based (deductive) and data-driven (inductive) coding: we first developed a code-set based on the literature we had used (e.g. definition of LLDs; challenges, such as quality, minimum requirements, issues of role; modes, such as on-site or remote, relay interpreting, or use of lingua franca) and then added codes based on additional topics we found in the interview data (e.g. examples of LLDs; recruitment practices). Parts of the interviews were discussed in Singureanu *et al*. 2023, but for the purposes of this paper, we will focus solely on data segments thematising LLD interpreting. Concentrating on this angle serves to make use of the inter-organisational perspective our data provide us with, revealing the feasibility of any suggested assessment procedures developed within the EU-WEBPSI project. Additionally, it highlights relevant topics to be covered in the training resources developed in the project (see section 4).

3.2. Defining LLDs and developing a contextual understanding

Unlike the more fine-grained definitions in academic sources (e.g. Salaets *et al*. 2016a), our interview partners relate LLDs to interpreting only and define them as languages for which they do not easily find interpreters, which seems evident because interpreting is their main concern, both in their daily contacts with LLDs and in the interviews. In our interview questions, we did not introduce a definition of LLDs but asked the interview partners how they coped with finding interpreters for different languages; if necessary, we also used the term "rare" languages to phrase our question. For some interviews, for example, I_OA, we did not even need this question, as the interview partners addressed this issue right from the start. Not surprisingly, they do not always use the academic label (languages of lesser/limited diffusion) when referring to languages that fall under this category, though it is used by some (I_OA: 0:13:53.880–0:13:55.350: "languages of lesser diffusion"; I_OC: 1:18:46.830–1:19:16.910: "less diffused languages"). Instead, they employ descriptors, such as the lack of interpreters for a particular language or the scarcity of a language in their daily work, to explain what constitutes an LLD in their line of work: "The ones that we don't find" (I_OB: 0:59:52.140–0:59:58.730).

While, as one interview partner suggests, "In a certain sense, all the languages of our applicants are languages of lesser diffusion" (I_OA: 0:14:19.220–0:14:48.460), this interview partner makes a distinction between "rare" and even "rarer" languages: "But

[5.] Segments and material from the interviews are referenced as I_OA [OB, OC] (Interview_Organisation A, B, or C).

there were within this group, there are some languages that are really rare" (I_OA: 0:14:19.220–0:14:48.460). This suggests that while they are aware of the concept, they are primarily concerned with overcoming the practical and concrete problem of finding interpreters for specific languages.

Our interview partners' accounts do not all provide the same specific examples of LLDs, as those depend on the national context and global refugee routes. Yet even if some languages are mentioned by all, such as Arabic, Dari, or Pashto, these languages may also be LLDs, as noted by our interview partner from OA: "So, even Arabic for us is a language of lesser diffusion" (I_OA: 2:10:41.170–2:11:3.40). What we can conclude from their explanations and examples of concrete "really rare" LLDs (for instance, Bambara, Oromo, and Tigrinya, to name a few) is that, theoretically, anyone tasked with finding interpreters at reception organisations would require a considerable knowledge of the specifics of certain language groups and their variants to be able to find suitable interpreters within an acceptable time frame. They provided us with examples, for instance, of how specific related languages may be confused and thus not understood if the interpreter does not speak the variant that is needed in a concrete situation (e.g. Mandinka and Malinke, I_OC: 1:17:15.10–1:17:48.20) or how finding specific variants (e.g. Arabic speakers from Morocco or from Algeria) "can be very tricky" (I_OB: 0:18:46.910–0:18:49.960). From these examples, we conclude that interpreter recruitment might be based on a trial-and-error approach if staff responsible for finding interpreters are not aware of the complexities of different language variants, which will be cost-intensive and, it can be assumed, frustrating. Not surprisingly, the process of interpreter recruitment is another topic that concerns all organisations in our sample and will be outlined in more detail below.

3.3. Practical solutions applied to address the lack of trained interpreters

The lack of (trained) interpreters for specific language combinations was a compelling motivation for setting up the EU-WEBPSI project and was a common denominator between all three organisations as a cross-organisational issue that might affect interpreting provision in the reception support and LLDs (see Filmer and Federici 2018 and examples in Iacono *et al*. 2024) more generally. In terms of interpreters, this means that recruitment often takes longer for LLDs than for other, more prevalently spoken, languages. Advance booking may be required (I_OB), which will have repercussions on time and case management. This, in turn, may require organisations to be as cost-efficient with booking as possible. One might assume that the establishment of in-house interpreters could be a solution. This, however, would also not be cost-efficient, particularly for the rarer languages, as mentioned by OA:

> And these languages, and of course, it doesn't make sense to have interpreters for these languages full-time in the arrival reception facilities. And so, whenever an interpreter is needed for these languages, they often use remote interpreting services, but for the rest, it's almost always on-site interpretation. (I_OA: 0:14:50.60–0:15:13.170)

Ideally, in such cases, transnational inter-agency cooperation, that is to say, finding interpreters who work for other agencies or authorities in other countries and connecting them through VMI, might be a solution. If used, this would require a critical assessment of the interpreters' qualifications and their suitability for specific contexts, which would require the staff to have at their disposal considerable resources to carry out assessment

of individuals' competences and a level of awareness on their part regarding the complexities of interpreting.

Other workarounds to compensate for a lack of suitable interpreters, as discussed by our interview partners, were relay interpreting or using a lingua franca in interpreted communication instead of using interpreters. Relay interpreting, though described as complex (see Mikkelson 1999) and requiring substantial organisational effort, is seen as a solution if no interpreters are found who can interpret directly from one particular LLD into (one of) the national language(s). In the case of OC, transnational interpreter recruitment also often involves relay interpreting (I_OC). Another option is the use of a lingua franca, for example, English (I_OA; I_OB; I_OC), a strategy that is similarly complex and particularly error-prone (see also Mikolič Južnič and Pokorn 2021) if local staff and officials do not know (enough) English themselves (I_OA: 0:57:45.360–0:57:52.250). While the use of English as a lingua franca was critically reviewed by our interview partner from OA, relay interpreting, which may be equally challenging, was not assessed as critically. This suggests that maybe more information on the demands of specific modes on interpreters, such as relay interpreting, might be advantageous to better equip and prepare staff and interpreters for the use of different modes and strategies and provide them with the necessary information to make an informed decision. In the context of the EU-WEBPSI project, this approach significantly informed the need to be more aware of applicants' profiles and opt for candidates able to stretch across specific national PSI markets to interpret in collaborative set-ups with more languages than only the national language.

A slightly different approach, discussed by our interview partners, was shown in cases when residents of reception centres stepped in to volunteer in an informal manner to act as non-professional interpreters. Discussing a slightly similar approach, although in a very different context, Martínez-Gómez (2016) described how prisoners, serving as interpreters for fellow inmates, are entangled in a complex web of power and face negotiation revolving around issues of trust. This situation was echoed in our data, which show an overall slight tendency to use beneficiaries as volunteers. This might prove empowering to resident volunteer interpreters on the one hand, but on the other, it simultaneously places them in a more powerful position vis-à-vis their fellow residents and makes them subject to different expectations by the other speakers, such as the centre staff or the other residents. One concrete example mentioned by our OA interviewee, however, shows that, despite limited resources, organisations may come up with creative strategies to counter the potentially negative aspects of using resident volunteers as interpreters. In an internal project at OA, for example, beneficiaries were trained and then employed as volunteer interpreters in a reception facility other than the one they live in and in clearly defined interactional contexts only. The benefits of such a project, in this interview partner's view, is that the value of their work may be recognised, if not through official remuneration then a least through a reward system: "[…] systems in which their effort and time is valorised to some extent, so they might get, they have like a point system, and if they have so much points, they will have extra I don't know what" (I_OA: 16:38.340–2:16:47.970). What remains to be discussed, however, is how effective such short-term measures really are and whether and how the outcomes could be evaluated.

The presumed lack of valorisation of LLD speakers' linguistic resources might figure as a factor adversely affecting interpreter training. As explained by our OA interviewee, it could deter speakers of certain LLDs from seeking (further) training, and European cooperation as envisaged in the EU-WEBPSI project could offer a solution:

> I think this is often difficult for very rare languages, that we cannot convince people to become actually trained interpreters because they will not make a living out of performing two hours a month, but if they are able to perform on a daily basis because they have a, well, they have work in collaboration with all of the European countries, then I think that it would be a significant advancement for them, in a way. (I_OA: 1:18:7.670–1:18:12.60)

Internal training may thus prove useful in motivating and empowering LLD speakers to make use of their linguistic skills.

3.4. Deriving implications for setting up LLD interpreting training

Explicitly addressing LLDs within the context of organisations and training raises a series of questions about minimum requirements and thresholds for quality interpreting practice, for our interview partners as well. For them, those questions trigger uncertainty, particularly about language proficiency, where interpreters' language skills are assumed to be "sufficient" (I_OA: 1:0:23.240 –1:0:25.910) at least.[6] What is understood by "sufficient," however, is not always transparent or specified to the people working with interpreters. This suggests that for staff (and extended networks), it remains unclear to what extent interpreting quality is influenced by language proficiency. Similarly, it seems that a minimum level of proficiency is essential to obtain an acceptable level of quality, although this might not be distinctly specified or agreed upon beforehand. Additionally, if they are aware of what constitutes minimum language skills for interpreting, there is the possibility that they cannot afford to be fastidious due to logistical constraints, and they may have no choice at all. One of our interview partners notes that in their case, it was this impossibility of being able to "formally control" interpreters' language proficiency that negatively impacted their working relationship with them in the long run.

> So, in this case, unfortunately, we have no way of formally controlling whether they fulfilled the actual standards of language that we require of them, and it is assumed that because they are being provided by a professional agency, that their level of English is sufficient, and it has only been one time that we had to, well, stop the collaboration with an interpreter because the level of English was clearly not sufficient. (I_OA: 1:0:23.240 –1:0:25.910)

Furthermore, language matching, where the staff ascertains which specific language or language variety is needed, may be difficult. Additionally, sometimes the interpreters booked are not suitable, as they do not speak the required variety. OC clarifies, though, that "100% understanding" (I_OC: 1:16:35.370–1:17:0.250) is paramount, and their interpreters, all of whom are trained, are required to inform their coordinators of any problems in understanding.

Based on the analysis, we concluded that providing interpretation for LLD speakers proves challenging for stakeholders in the field, with few institutionalised practices and standards and a large number of impromptu and low-key solutions. All organisations in our sample are faced with a shortage of LLD interpreters with qualifications and the experience that comes with them. There is also little awareness of the intricacies of different interpreting modes, minimum language requirements, and the specifics of

6. For the EU-WEBPSI project, the minimum language level agreed upon for entrance-level language proficiency was B2 under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (although with some exceptions to account for LLD speakers with low literacy levels), in accordance with the minimum standards developed for the project (see Guaus *et al*. 2023).

different variants of LLDs. Different recruitment practices are employed to find suitable interpreters, who are often non-professional ones. While our interview partners are aware of different problems related to existing recruitment practices, they may, nonetheless, have to rely on practices that are less than ideal because of unavailability of interpreters, cost-efficiency, or procurement rules. These findings have several implications for the design and organisation of entrance assessment practices for LLD interpreter training, relating to a diverse range of training contexts, the different backgrounds of teachers/trainers, and the likely use of VMI in (LLD) interpreting practice nowadays. Organisations need assessment materials that are either ready to use, due to their limited resources, or that can be easily adapted and localised to their needs.

4. Showcasing an entrance assessment approach

From the IS literature and interviews with reception support organisations, we gained an in-depth understanding of the contextual difficulties of both LLD interpreting and language testing for LLD speakers. Whether due to a lack of evaluators available to assist with and evaluate performance testing in the working languages and the LLDs, insufficient funds for the costs involved in setting up or taking language tests, or constraints arising from pressing and sustained needs for interpreters, it is sometimes necessary to curtail exhaustive testing arrangements. Any materials provided, therefore, need to be flexible, as organisational demands may differ, and one solution might not fit the purposes of all.

Our aim of helping trainers or other individuals with responsibility for educating and training LLD interpreters remained unchanged after our analysis of the interviews. It was recalibrated, however, to further assist them by providing material that can be easily adapted to trainings of different lengths, specializations, and depths, since the infrastructural circumstances of trainings differ, and organisations may decide to prioritise diverse aspects of teaching. A primary orientation for trainers in charge of LLD interpreting training is provided to them in the form of a "growth path" (see EU-WEBPSI 2024), which helps them address their training initiative according to the available time and instructional goals and adjust the entrance assessment accordingly. With that in mind, a train-the-trainer manual was devised (see section 3), of which one module focused on entrance assessment.

The information provided in the assessment module supports trainers in different scenarios in screening candidates' linguistic ability for entrance purposes, even if the trainers might prioritise certain test categories (e.g. language testing, knowledge testing, technical skills). Of these, language testing presumably presents them with the most difficulties due to the variety of languages that might need to be assessed. This creates challenges not only for the organisation of the tests but also for their evaluation (see Skaaden 2013). As finding the right assessment method is highly dependent on the group of applicants, the languages spoken, and the length and depth of training, we developed two decision trees to help trainers find a suitable individual solution (see González Figueroa and Pöllabauer 2024: 6–7). Decision tree 1 shows options for entrance assessment for LLDs (see Figure 1). To address cases where there is a lack of materials, resources, or both in specific languages, or where there are no evaluators to carry out the testing and appraise its results, the assessment module suggests testing activities that draw on both internally and externally available testing structures but differentiates here between LLDs and the other working languages of a candidate.

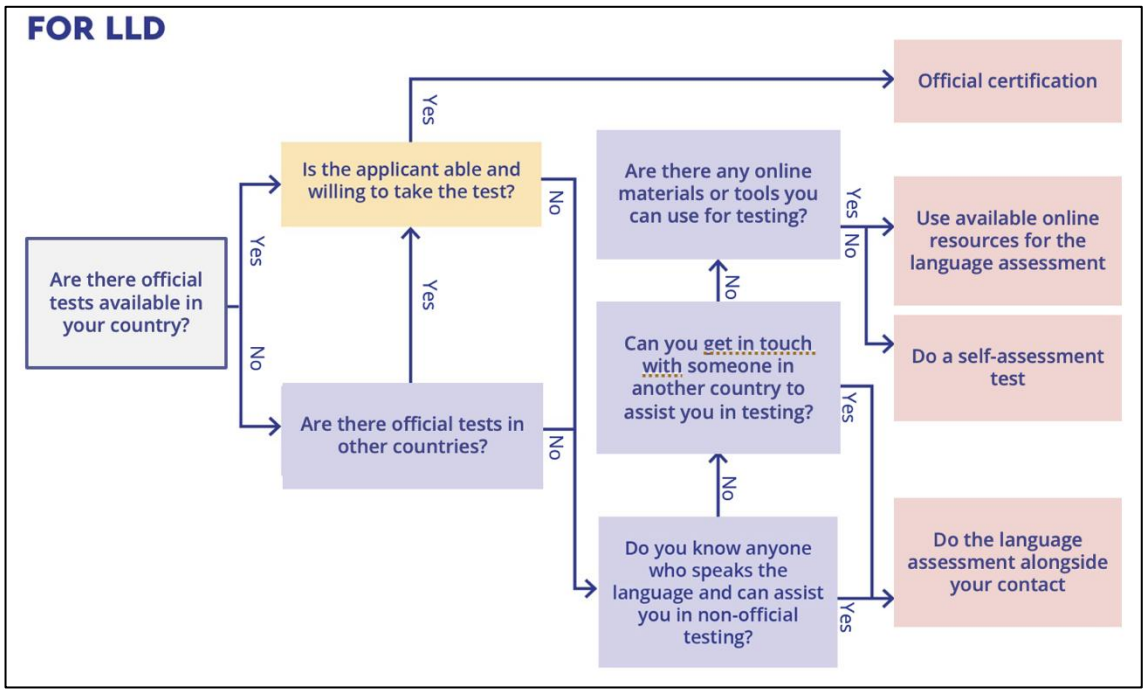

Figure 1. Decision tree – LLD.

Decision tree 2 (see Figure 2) explains options for testing applicants speaking a country's official language(s).

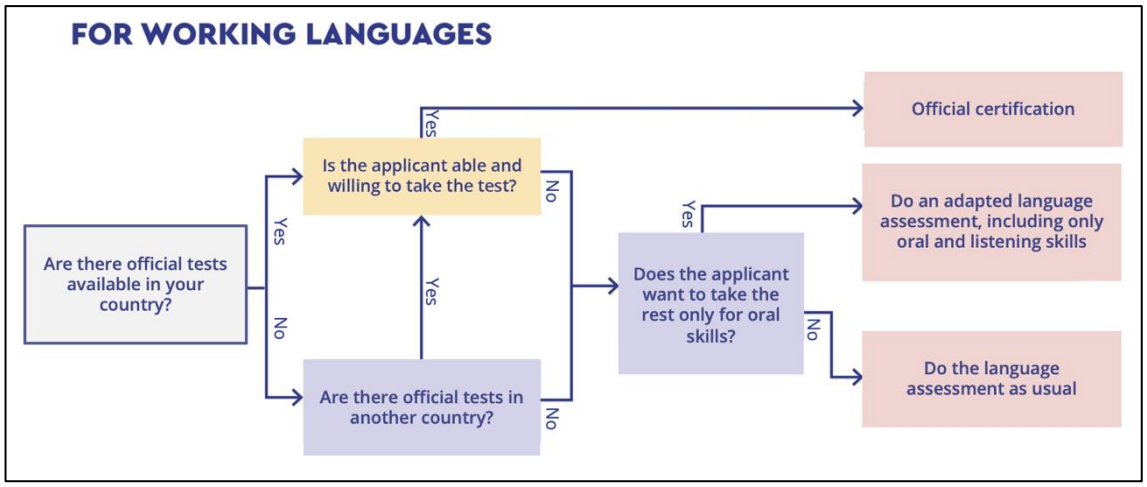

Figure 2. Decision tree – formalised language testing.

At its core, the main challenge when assessing the language proficiency of LLD speakers lies in the variability of languages as well as the likelihood of highly diverse groups of trainees, as previously mentioned. Theoretical aspects of the entrance module, therefore, inform on the tenets of language proficiency and language testing as well as on special considerations when working with LLDs. As examples, trainees might not have the means to take standardised language proficiency tests or might not completely fulfil the requirements if, for instance, their literacy level lies under B2 in the programme's main instructional language. There is also the pressing issue of testing itself, however, as trainees should demonstrate an appropriate language level for all their working languages; in other words, they need an appropriate level for their respective LLD as well as for the language of instruction.

What we learned from our interviews with reception support organisations prompted the provision of easy-to-use solutions for different organisational contexts, with ready-made test packages that both ease the workload of trainers and provide useful templates for future reference[7] but also allow trainers to be flexible and adapt test scenarios to their organisation and contextual needs. As mentioned above, the module integrated a theoretical context on LLDs but was further divided to include a ready-to-use entrance assessment test, which includes non-language-specific test options, guidelines for testing, and a self-assessment test.

Regarding the test itself, each section comprises a scoring grid and two testing options: depending on the type of test and the competency, these testing options are either (a) ready-to-use examples or (b) guidelines detailing how to prepare the test. As an example, the section on listening comprehension provides a text to be read out loud and an accompanying set of questions, which can be used immediately. Alternatively, the second option is a guideline detailing how to find audio files and ask follow-up questions, including which topics to look for and formats to use. In a general sense, the test targets the four main competencies delimited by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Considering potentially low literacy levels, however, and, of course, the skills most needed in an interpreting setting, the reading and writing segments are considered optional. Also optional is a short interpreting skills test, which was included to broaden the scope of eligible applicants and is to be used only when a promising applicant has achieved a borderline score or one below the cut-off level. With this approach, we seek to offer applicants on the threshold of approval the possibility of improving their overall score by demonstrating interpreting skills, thus avoiding the exclusion of capable interpreters on the basis of language competences alone.

Both the examples and the guidelines allow for a high degree of flexibility and can be easily adapted to the local context of trainers, either in terms of content or language. To address potential shortcomings arising from languages not spoken by trainers during evaluation, it is strongly recommended to work alongside language experts or people proficient in the language, although it is clear that this might not always be feasible. For such cases, there is the possibility of utilising the self-assessment test. Alternatively, the guidelines created offer some ideas on how to select materials in an unknown language, for instance by selecting a topic trainers are very familiar with or by making use of multilingual websites or automated translation tools. Within the framework of the project and the training modules, this decision was a pragmatic one, as a very strict language selection might hinder the enlisting of trainees and might ultimately fail to enrich interpreter provision for LLDs.

For reasons of scope, we cannot report on the piloting of either the entrance assessment routines chosen by the EU-WEBPSI partners or the training design, which will be addressed in a separate paper. It is worth mentioning, however, that the test material focuses on language proficiency only. Ideally, though, and given how central the issues of trust and positionality turned out to be in the interviews, it could also be complemented with tasks to test candidates' social skills and personality factors. This could be achieved, for example, through interviewing, group exercises (see Pöllabauer *et al.* 2024), or psychometric testing options.

[7] Due to its contents, this test was developed as an annex to the module on entrance assessment and requires special permits to be accessed. For more information, see https://www.webpsi.eu/

5. Final remarks

This paper has discussed entrance assessment for LLD speakers to be trained for asylum and reception contexts. Instead of relying on the recruitment of non-professional interpreters, interpreting training for LLD speakers is an answer to the need to increase interpreting capacity for LLDs, which is exacerbated by both the continuously changing dynamics of cross-linguistic demand in public services and the key characteristics of LLD interpreting. With the aim of strengthening the research-based interpreting training praxis for LLD interpreting, the approach taken to develop the EU-WEBPSI materials offers a contextually open design that is also adaptable to existing training programmes. In this way, trainers and evaluators should be encouraged to adjust the provided training materials to other local and organisational contexts.

In applying an action research framework, we have learned from reception and asylum support organisations that training and working with LLD interpreters requires organisations to be highly flexible in their approach. Starting with the assessment of candidates, as reported in the literature, situations might be far from ideal, as organisations might lack resources for an extensive assessment process or perhaps do not have the necessary budget to work alongside external language experts. Similarly, the pressing concern of finding candidates proficient in the needed LLDs might require a less strict minimum language level or the circumvention of screening for personality traits and social skills due to the number of suitable candidates being too low.

The insights gained from reception support organisations, however, might mirror other contexts of LLD interpreting practice, for example crisis, disaster, or humanitarian aid support, where time constraints and available resources are equally or even more pressing. The collaboration with social partners, as practised in the EU-WEBPSI project, allows, then, for a realistic view of actual needs. Our exploration into support organisations' views of LLD interpreting and analysis of perceived challenges in interpreting provision reveals that different low-resource strategies are in place that enable organisations to remain pragmatic and flexible, considering complex institutional set-ups and contextual constraints. For this project, we worked alongside organisations with a clear desire for improvement, hence their participation in the project. Specifically, we were in contact with interview partners who were aware of the main challenges and who were involved in the organisational aspects of interpreting provision, which provided us with valuable insights but still restricted us to only a subset of all actors involved. Along these lines, any further studies focusing on perceptions in the field could only enrich the outcomes and findings of this project, for instance by interviewing volunteer non-professional interpreters or even refugees themselves. Of course, such projects would present different difficulties and far surpass the scope of this paper, but it is, nonetheless, worth mentioning that such a focus could provide a complementary vision of the field described above.

What is more, concerning LLD (non-professional) interpreting practices, in particular, there are still some unknown aspects and open questions that deserve further exploration. While we focused on entrance assessment, the training of LLD speakers for interpreting in reception and asylum contexts, as addressed by Maryns *et al*. (in preparation), and VMI practices in those contexts Singureanu *et al*. (in preparation), remains equally important. Our empirical research also indicates that relay interpreting with an LLD or working with a lingua franca is becoming more common. Though both are assumed to be taxing and susceptible to error, these practices remain severely under-researched, as does how non-professional interpreters deal with related challenges, and it is not yet clear to what degree they contribute to our main goal, namely, increasing

linguistic accessibility to public services by qualified interpreters. For this reason, it should also be an immediate and long-term concern to pursue this line of research. Strengthening training options through research-based, open-access material and striving for close collaboration between different stakeholders involved in interpreting may go a long way to setting up not just a functioning but also a sustainable way of educating and training practitioners, especially for LLDs.

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