

Overcoming the language barrier: Using interpreters effectively

Presented by:

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Goals

Enhance communication with individuals and families by:

- understanding how culture affects communication
- learning practical techniques for effective use of interpreters

Title VI

Civil Rights Act

- 1964
- No recipient of federal funding may run its programs in such a manner as to discriminate on the basis of race, color or country of origin.

- One common form of discrimination is the ineffective methods of communication provided to limited-English-speaking clients.
- Linguistically appropriate services—i.e., the provision of translated written materials and oral interpretation services—are vital for a person's understanding, compliance, and positive outcomes.

What's the Difference? Cultural Competence, Awareness, and Sensitivity

- **Cultural competence emphasizes the idea of effectively operating in different cultural contexts, and altering practices to reach different cultural groups.**
- **Cultural knowledge, sensitivity, and awareness do not include this concept. Although they imply understanding of cultural similarities and differences, they do not include action or structural change.**

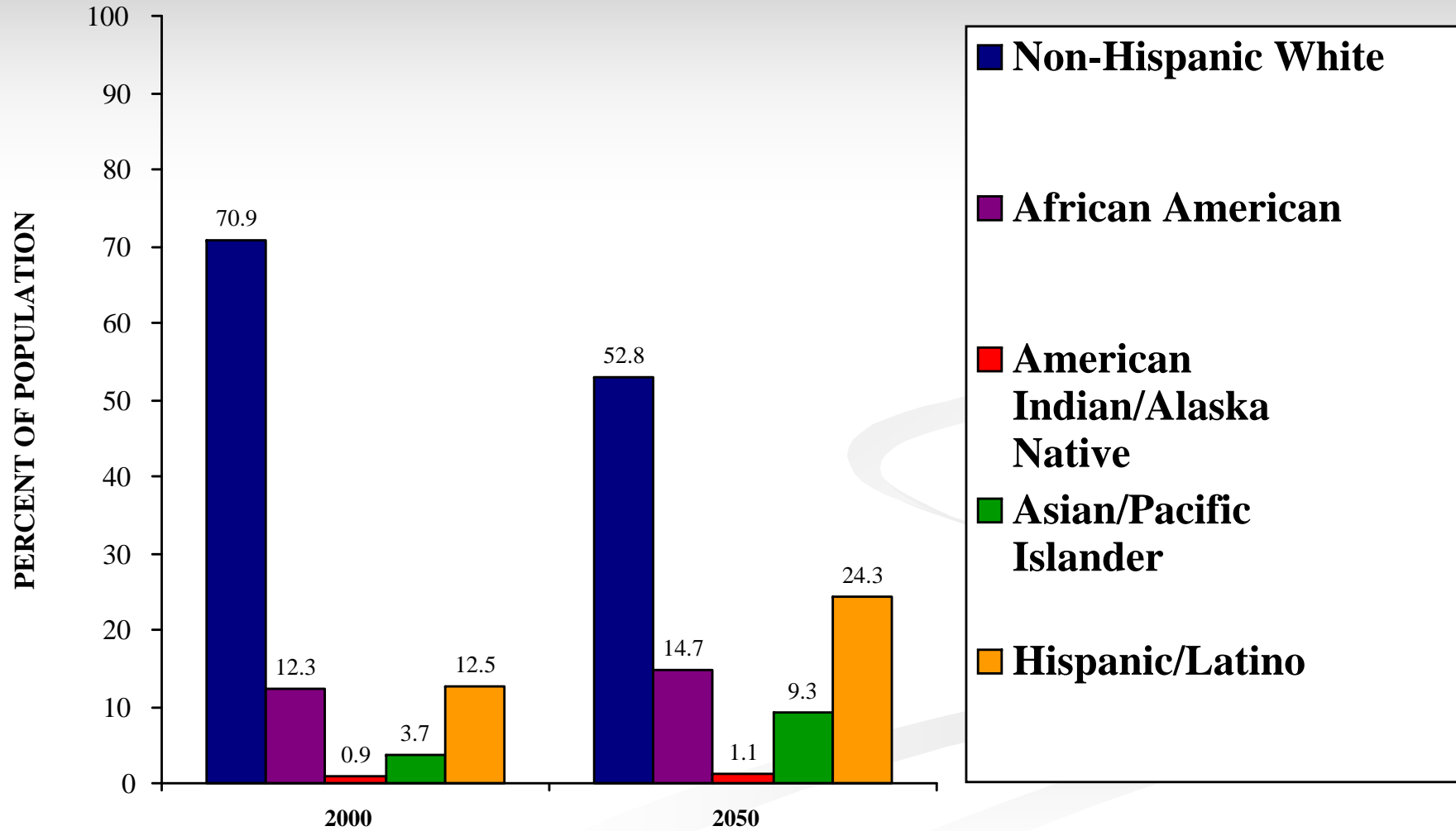
2000 Census US Population

- White: 69.1%
- Hispanic/Latino: 12.5%
- Black/African American: 12.1%
- Asian: 3.6%
- American Indian & Alaska Native: .7%
- Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander: .1%
- Other: .2%

Population Projections: 2050

- White: 52.8% (69.1% now)
- Black/African American: 13.6% (12.1% now)
- Hispanic/Latino: 24.5% (12.5% now)
- Asian: 8.2% (3.6% now)
- American Indian: .9% (.7% now)

Population by Race & Hispanic Origin: United States, 2000 & Projected 2050

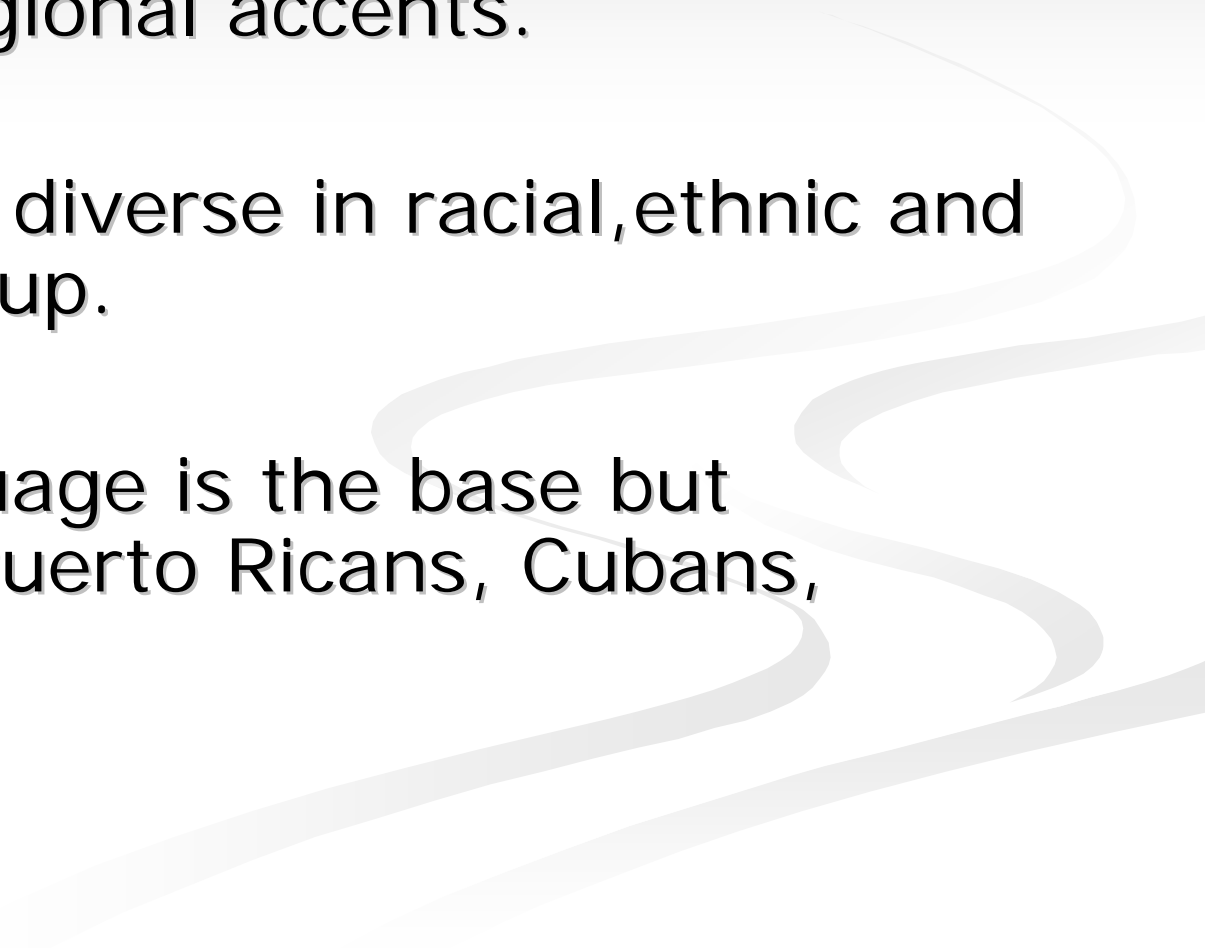


Effective communication: Language and culture

The exchange of information between sender and receiver with the least possible loss of meaning through language.

Discovering each person's unique culture as a way to connect and deliver information in a manner that is more receptive.

Language

- Languages are comprised of dialects, slang, and regional accents.
 - Countries are diverse in racial, ethnic and cultural makeup.
 - Spanish language is the base but different for Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Argentinians.
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Language

- Language acquisition is difficult and varies greatly.
- Ask families what language they are more comfortable speaking.
- Mexican families: Spanish, English, Spanglish
- Is native language an indigenous dialect

Language

- Adults and children have vastly different levels of language acquisition
- Pre-school children may seem bilingual have a limited English vocabulary
- Stay at home mothers usually have limited or no English skills

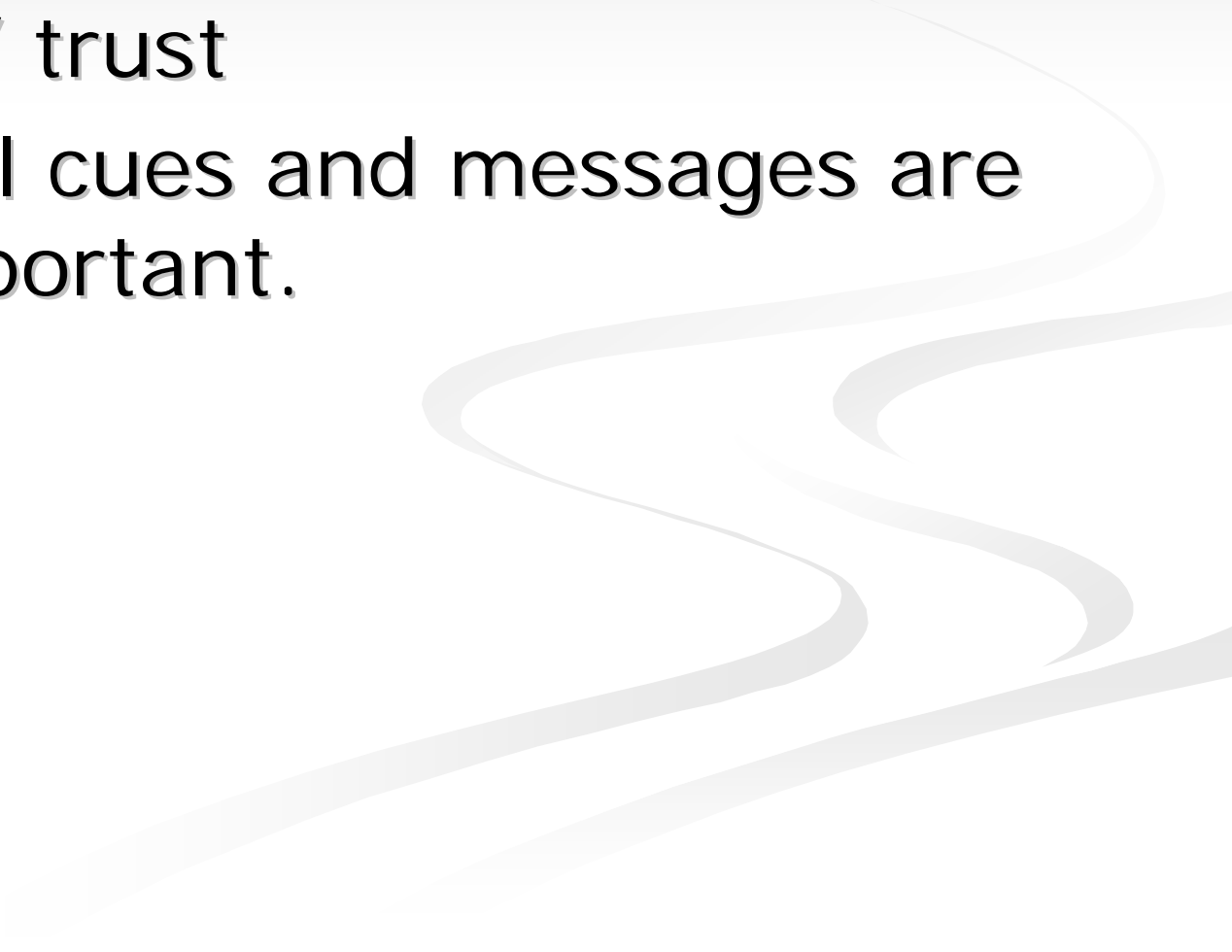
Language

- An adult or child may be proficient in English and the majority of the time will prefer to speak in their native language.

Ask Questions

- What language is spoken in the home, school or work?
- Mexican Spanish vs. Cuban Spanish
- Spanish as a second language?

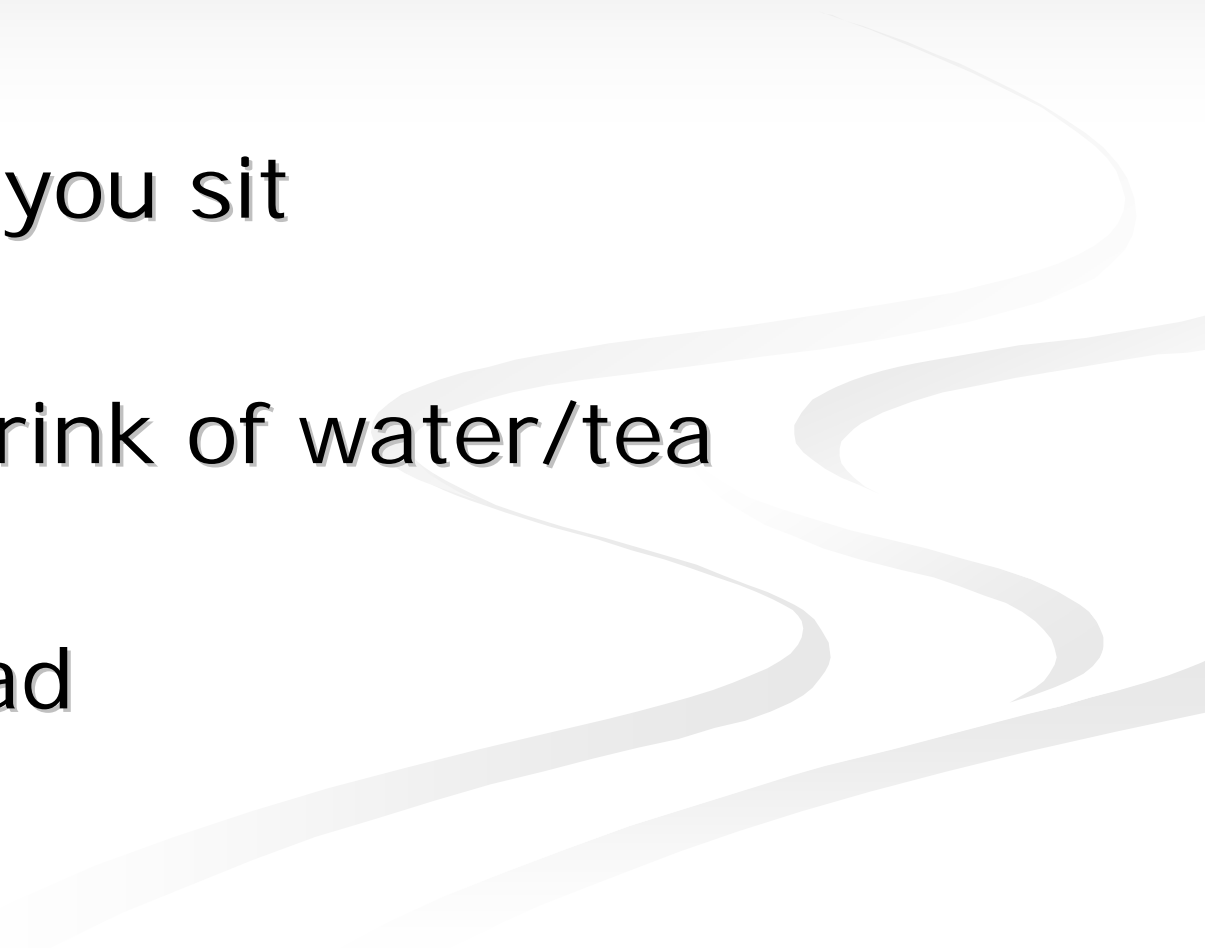
Culture

- Personalismo/ personal connection
 - Confianza/ trust
 - Non-verbal cues and messages are just as important.
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Cultural considerations:

- Harmony and self-effacement are important values in cultures such as Asian and Native American
- agreeing in order not to offend,
- deferring to authority and not disagreeing,
- qualify all statements of knowledge
- Smiling to cover shame or embarrassment

Cultural considerations

- Personal space
 - Where/how you sit
 - Offering a drink of water/tea
 - Nodding head
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Cultural Considerations

- Pauses: Silence an integral part of communication for some cultures
- Be careful about interpreting pauses negatively; may lose information if new question comes too quickly

Cultural Considerations:

- Person lowers head and doesn't make eye contact--a sign of lying or a sign of respect?
- Person can't get to point in narrative--can't follow directions? Evasive? Perhaps a culturally accepted method of story telling?
- Linear vs non-linear narrative

Cultural Considerations:

- Unquestioning loyalty to and respect for elders valued highly in many cultures
- Revealing sensitive, family related information to a stranger can be very difficult.

Types of Interpretation

- Sequential
 - Simultaneous
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Simultaneous

- The interpreter quietly translates for observers without disrupting pace of conversation; many details may be lost.

Sequential

- A statement is made, the speaker waits while the interpreter conveys the exact information to the receiver; the client answers and waits while her words are conveyed.

Who should not interpret

- Never use children!
- Children could be forced into position of power over parent
- Children likely to be protective of parents or embarrassed by subject matter
- Children may be traumatized by need to pass on bad news

Who should not interpret

- Avoid using adult family members
- Family members not familiar with psychosocial or medical terms
- Family may not be comfortable discussing complex issues with extended family

Who should not interpret

- Avoid using neighbors
- Immigrant communities are small and tight knit; they cluster in neighborhoods for support and resources
- If an acquaintance interprets, family may worry about gossip and loss of confidentiality

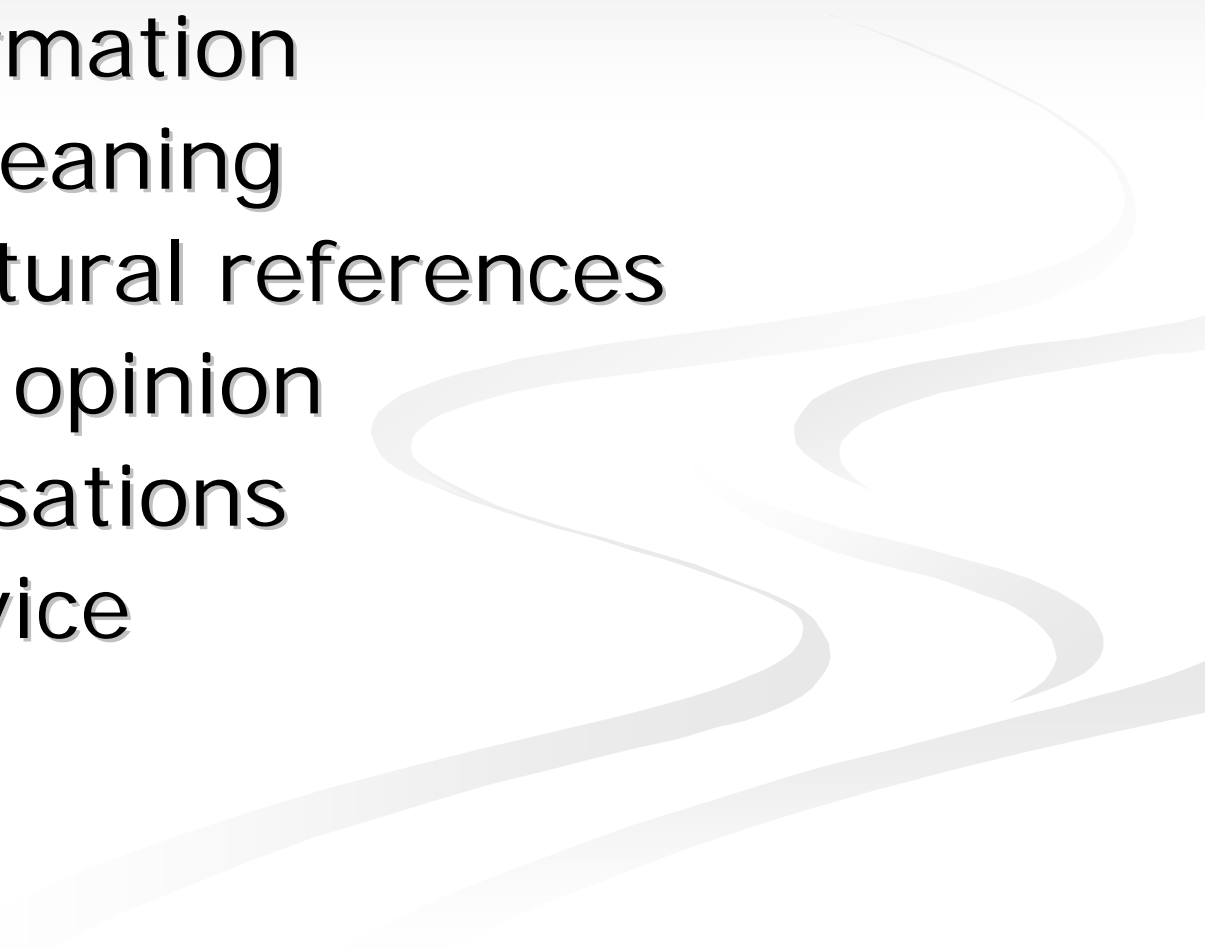
Who should interpret

- Being bilingual is not enough
- Trained interpreters learn technical skills and ethical issues
- Certification gives assurance of competence
- Agencies provide training and guidelines of conduct
- Agency based interpreter more likely to be neutral

Who should interpret

- Keep a record of competent interpreters
- For repeat visits, use the same interpreter
- Trusted interpreter becomes familiar with format and content and becomes part of the team
- Minimal expectation: be fluent in both languages and have some training
- Designate a bilingual staff person to interpret as part of job description.
- A bilingual receptionist to take calls and greet

Common Issues with Interpreters

- Omitting information
 - Adding information
 - Changing meaning
 - Deleting cultural references
 - Adding own opinion
 - Side conversations
 - Offering advice
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The Time Factor

- Conversations double in length
- Time allotted for evaluations must increase
- Potential for error and misunderstanding multiplies
- Added time increases fatigue

Ground Rules for Interpreter

- Don't edit questions or responses
- If one party does not understand, convey the misunderstanding
- Don't omit portions of questions or responses
- Don't embellish
- Translate in first person

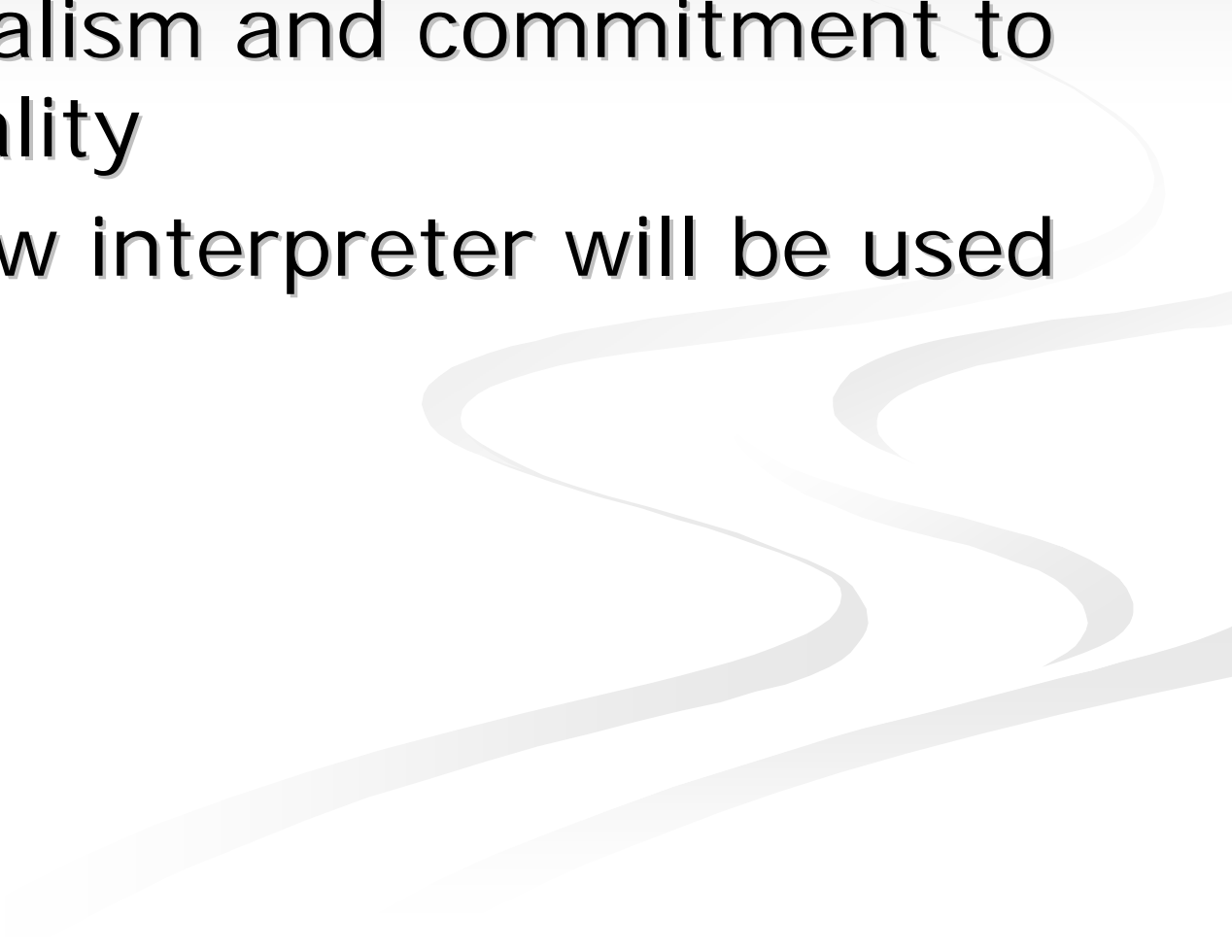
Ground rules, cont.

- Convey the content and the spirit of what is said, the real meaning
- Remind the interpreter of her awesome power, she can greatly impact outcomes
- Refrain from judgment, make no comment or let biases show
- Tell the interpreter not to give advice or opinions

Ground Rules, cont.

- Ask the interpreter to interpret and report all cultural information
- Stress the importance of the interpreter not being verbally or physically intrusive
- Interpreter should be a transparent conduit of information, easily seen and heard

Preparing the family

- Reassure family of interpreter's professionalism and commitment to confidentiality
 - Explain how interpreter will be used
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Prepare the Interpreter

- Meet with interpreter before you start to clarify roles and expectations
- Obtain written statement of confidentiality
- Assess interpreter's comfort level with subject matter and expectations

Practical Reminders

- Introduce child/family to interpreter with explanation of roles and confidentiality
- Meet with interpreter to clarify expectations
- Position interpreter behind or to the side— conversation is between interviewer individual
- Speak in short units rather than long phrases
- One topic at a time

Practical Reminders

- Avoid difficult words, idiomatic expressions, slang, similes, metaphors
- Look at and speak directly to the client, not the interpreter
- A positive tone of voice conveys respect
- Never be condescending or judgmental

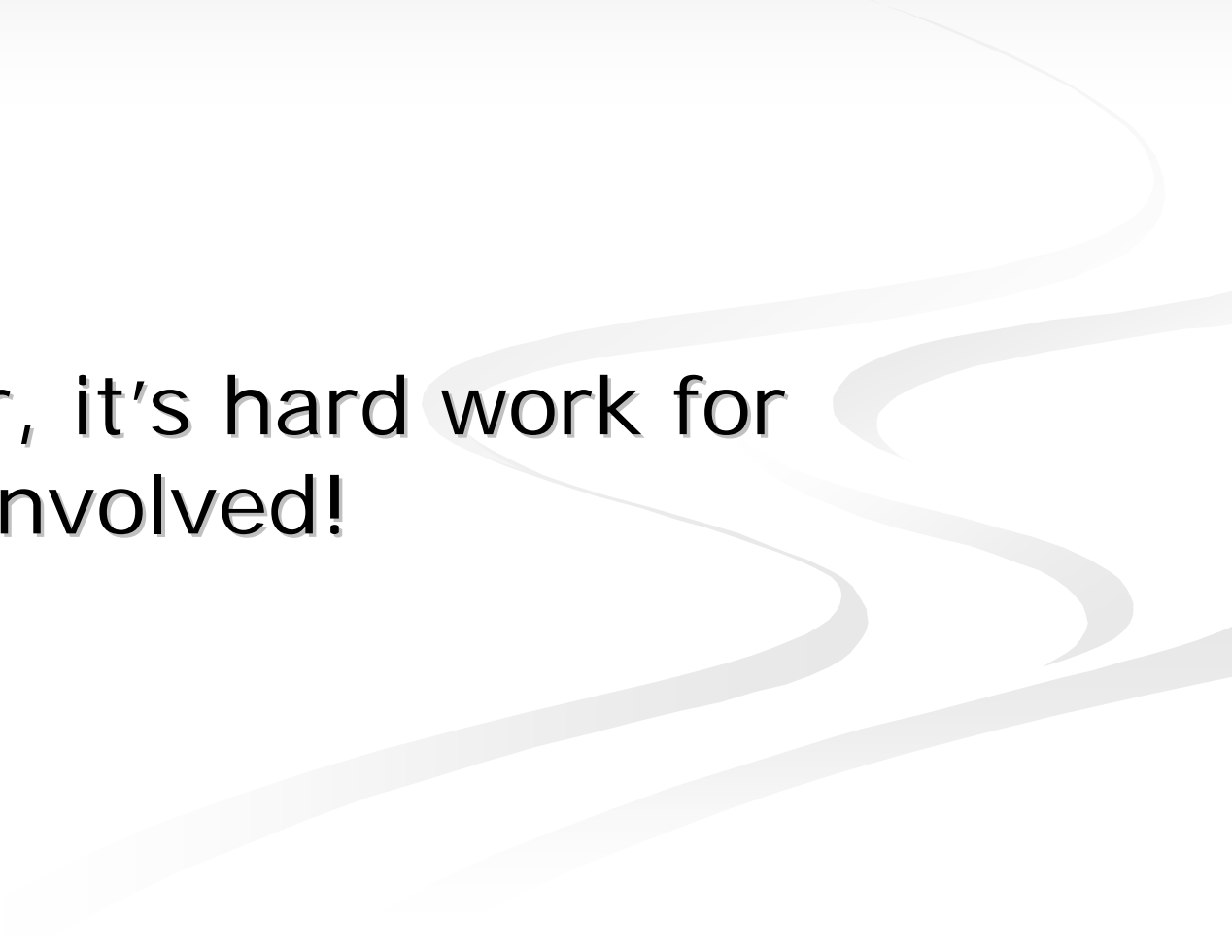
Practical Reminders

- Be aware of body language
- Ask for clarification when you sense something isn't being communicated clearly
- No side conversations
- Remind interpreter to interpret everything, as needed

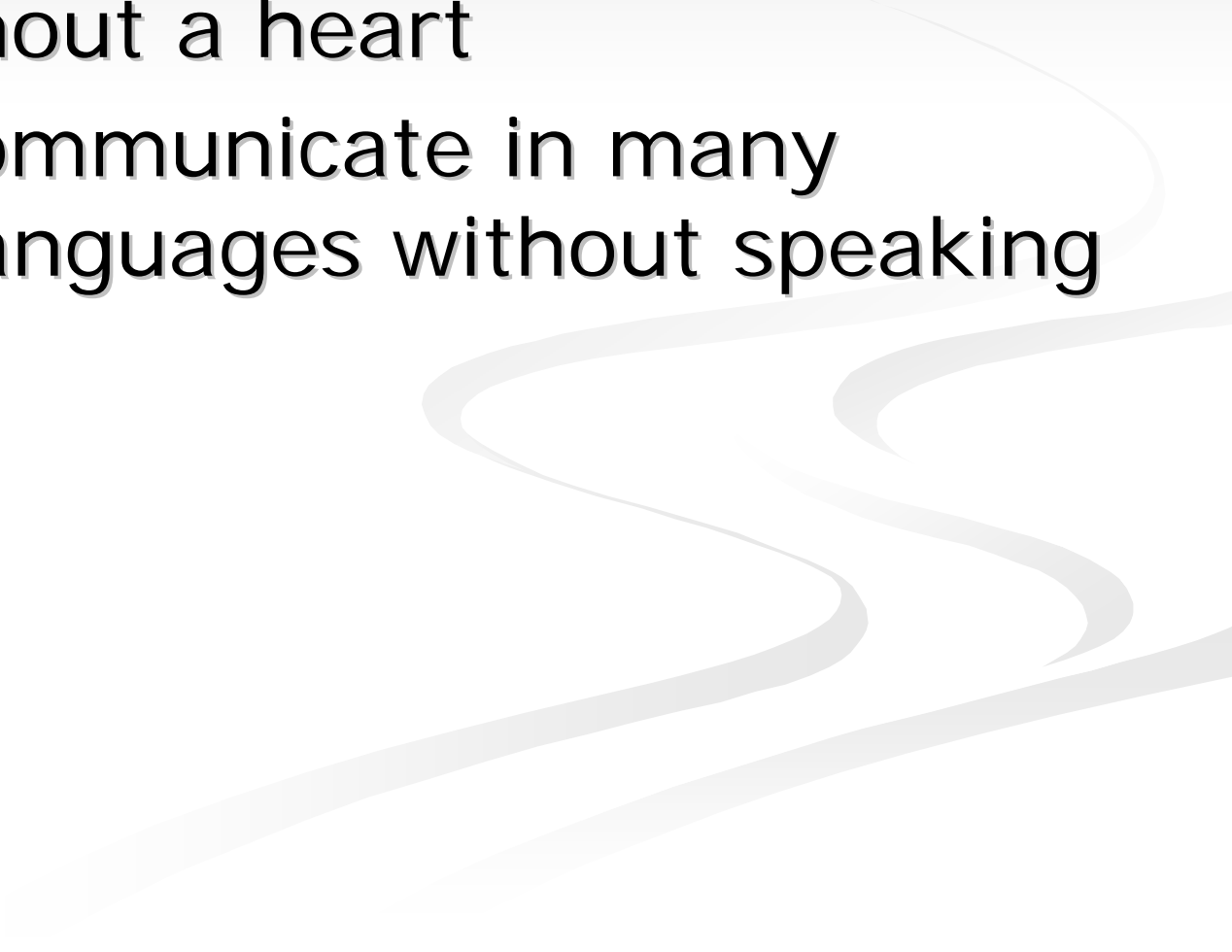
Practical Reminders

- Repeat important information
- Give the reason for any recommendation
- Provide understandable explanation of legal and medical systems
- Reinforce verbal information with written materials in client's language

Keep in Mind

- Stay positive
 - Be patient
 - Remember, it's hard work for everyone involved!
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Closing

- A heart without words is better than words without a heart
 - You can communicate in many different languages without speaking them
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