INTERPRETER-MEDIATED QUESTIONING OF MINORS (IMQM): THE VOICE OF CHILDREN AND THEIR RAPPORT WITH INTERPRETERS

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Abstract

This paper focuses on interpreter-mediated interviews with victims, suspects and witnesses under the age of 18 who are vulnerable because of their age, native language and country of presence, with particular emphasis on how to provide the necessary information, support and protection for this group. The paper reports on the results of the European project Cooperation in Interpreter-Mediated Questioning of Minors (CMIQ). As the name suggests, cooperation and teamwork among stakeholders are of paramount importance in interpreter-mediated questioning of minors (ImQM). This contribution will focus on semi-structured interviews conducted by Belgian researchers with twelve Flemish children, boys and girls aged five to 17, of which 11 were hearing and one was deaf. Based on the outcomes of twelve semi-structured interviews with minors, results point to specific perceptions of the interpreter reported by children: the interpreter seems to be the person they turn to when speaking and the person they trust most. Since codes of ethics prescribe, among other things, neutrality and often even 'invisibility' on the part of the interpreter, reflection on this topic is necessary. Based on the paramount importance of rapport-building with the child, this paper argues that the role of interpreters should be discussed not only during a briefing, but also in joint interprofessional training. In this way, all stakeholders improve their knowledge of their respective professional roles in ImQM situations, which helps to further tackle contradictory expectations with regard to the role of the interpreter.

Keywords: minors; interpreter-mediated questioning; ethical code of the interpreter; briefing; joint interprofessional training.

LA INTERROGACIÓ DE MENORS AMB MEDIACIÓ D'INTÈRPRETS: LA VEU DE LES NENES I NENS I LA SEVA RELACIÓ AMB LES INTÈRPRETS

Resum

Aquest article se centra en les entrevistes amb mediació d'intèrprets a víctimes, sospitosos i testimonis menors de divuit anys, que són vulnerables a causa de la seva edat, la llengua nativa i el país en què es troben, i es fa un èmfasi especial en la manera de proporcionar la informació, el suport i la protecció necessaris per a aquest grup. El document informa sobre els resultats del projecte europeu Cooperació en la interrogació de menors amb mediació d'intèrprets (CMIQ, en anglès). Tal com suggereix el nom, la cooperació i el treball en equip entre les parts interessades tenen una importància cabdal en la interrogació de menors amb mediació d'intèrprets (ImQM, en anglès). Aquesta contribució se centra en les entrevistes semiestructurades que van dur a terme investigadores belgues amb dotze nenes i nens flamencs, nois i noies amb una edat compresa entre els cinc i els disset anys, dels quals onze hi sentien i un era sord. A partir de les dades obtingudes a les dotze entrevistes semiestructurades amb menors, els resultats apunten cap a percepcions específiques de l'intèrpret, tal com indiquen els infants: sembla que la intèrpret és la persona cap a la qual miren quan parlen i la persona en qui més confien. Atès que els codis ètics estableixen que hi ha d'haver, entre d'altres, neutralitat i, fins i tot, sovint, "invisibilitat" per part de la intèrpret, cal reflexionar sobre aquest tema. Basant-se en la importància cabdal que té establir una relació amb l'infant, aquest article sosté que aquest paper de les intèrprets s'hauria de tractar no només durant una sessió informativa, sinó també en una formació interprofessional conjunta. D'aquesta manera, totes les parts interessades milloren el coneixement sobre els seus papers professionals respectius en situacions d'ImQM, cosa que ajuda a abordar millor les expectatives contradictòries pel que fa al paper de la intèrpret.

Paraules clau: menors; interrogació amb mediació d'intèrprets; codi ètic de l'intèrpret; sessió informativa; formació interprofessional conjunta.

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Summary

1 Introduction

This paper reports on the results of the CO-Minor-IN/QUEST projects (Cooperation in Interpreter-Mediated Questioning of Minors, hereinafter CMIQ), examining interpretations conducted during the questioning of children in the pre-trial phase of criminal cases. Interpreter-mediated questioning of minors (ImQM) is a very specific setting involving a multidisciplinary team of psychologists, child care workers, legal actors (lawyers, police officers and examining magistrates) and interpreters. The first project (CMIQ-I) used an international online survey to gather knowledge from professionals representing all of these profiles, specifically on the needs they, as experts in the field, perceived in each of the partner countries. The ethical conduct of interpreters stood out among the relevant issues to arise, mostly in regard to the other participants' understanding of the interpreter's role in the ImQM. An example of these, at times conflicting, ideas about ethical conduct and the interpreter's role is that other professionals in ImQM expect the interpreter to explain technical terminology or adapt the level of the language used to the linguistic level of the child. This contradicts the ethical rule of impartiality and neutrality that interpreters must adhere to.

The second project (CMIQ-II) introduced a unique interview approach in a quasi-experimental setting, asking children who had been involved in questionings about their thoughts, needs, fears and experiences during interpreter-mediated interviews. This was the first time ever that the voices of children in this kind of dialogue setting had been heard and analysed. Semi-structured interviews were held in Belgium, France, Hungary and Italy. Surprising outcomes were revealed in relation to the children's perception of the interpreter; for instance, the interpreter was perceived as the person they could trust. This leads us to reflect on and discuss interpreters' codes of ethics, which are usually very strict and often appear as a list of constraints consisting of dos and don'ts. Such discussions can be conducted in a structural way during joint interprofessional training sessions of all the stakeholders, but also in a more *ad hoc* way during a briefing of the team immediately prior to questioning, offering the possibility of negotiating the interpreter's code of ethics, placing the best interest of the child above all considerations. As will become clear in the second part of this contribution, ImQM is of course a sensitive setting which requires specialised training for everybody, including the interpreter.

We must add the disclaimer that we consider professional legal interpreters to be interpreters who have received, as a minimum, training in legal knowledge and terminology, heuristics (finding legal sources), interpreting techniques (consecutive, simultaneous whispering, note-taking), codes of ethics for interpreters, working with legal actors (role plays, mock trials and internships) for a minimum of 150 hours face-to-face with experts, followed by exams in all these disciplines prior to accreditation. Only accredited, professional interpreters according to this definition were selected as part of the research design.

2 Questioning of children: the evolving state of the art

New European regulations such as Directives 2010/64/EU (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2010) and, two years later, 2012/29/EU (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2012) encouraged the Directorate General of the EU to provide funding for research. The research team decided to deal with vulnerable victims, namely minors (under the age of 18) who did not speak the language of the legal system to which they found themselves subject. In the context of the first CMIQ project (JUST/2011/JPEN/AG/2961) in Antwerp, the research team organised an introductory workshop in May 2013, where CMIQ partners from Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and Scotland brought together a broad range of professionals to work in teams on the questioning of children in criminal proceedings, including trainers in forensic interview techniques, legal practitioners, psychologists, child support workers and interpreters for spoken and signed languages. The workshop brought to light the difficulties, needs and aspirations of ImQM. This fruitful exchange provided crucial information for the design of a questionnaire which was subsequently circulated in the six partner countries from mid-October 2013 to mid-December 2013. A non-probability sampling method, the network/snowballing method (Hale & Napier, 2013: 71), was applied, which resulted in access to responses from non-participating European and non-European countries. The questionnaire responses enabled the research team to undertake a first mapping of the most salient needs and concerns related to ImQM. Although the results of the questionnaire will not be explored in this paper, the general outcome can be summarised as an attempt to define a research-based approach to developing

skills and knowledge related to how to protect children's safety and development while they are being questioned to obtain necessary information. Keywords in the outcomes were trust (not only among the professionals involved, but also towards them, from the perspective of the child), teamwork and the need for more specialised training for working effectively in this particular setting.

2.1 Previous research

When the project was first designed in 2011, to the best of our knowledge, only two journal articles had dealt specifically with the problematics of interviewing minors with an interpreter in a forensic or asylum setting. The first is the publication of Matthias and Zaal's (2002) paper on interpreting in South African courts. Even though this text does not contain any information or reference to European cases or pre-trial interviews, it is clear that some key problems are relevant across borders, e.g. "the inability of many interpreters to relate or communicate appropriately when working with child-witnesses" (Matthias & Zaal, 2002: 250). The fact that the vulnerability of children is not taken into account was viewed critically through interviews with social workers, lawyers and court staff.

The authors offer solutions and recommendations suggested by the respondents, such as improving the work environment of court interpreters. This can be achieved by training other court staff to understand some of the difficulties which interpreters routinely contend with by changing procedures so that interpreters can engage with children in a less formal manner; by allocating more time; by establishing rapport; and by assessing the communication capabilities of child-witnesses (Matthias & Zaal, 2002: 363). It is highly surprising that this publication of paramount importance has had no wider dissemination. Our research in fact confirmed many of its findings, including the need for joint training for court interpreters and court personnel as well as other stakeholders involved in ImQM, such as psychologists, therapists and child support workers. Among other things, this joint training could focus on whose job it is to use child-appropriate language (e.g. police officers, judges or lawyers),[1] for instance, by informing the aforementioned professionals that in an ImQM setting it is not part of the interpreter's job to adapt the language so that it is child appropriate.[2] In doing so, we must take into account the risk that "a rigid separation of the functions of interpreters from those of other persons present at court" (Matthias & Zaal, 2002: 369) may endanger collaboration (or teamwork, as we prefer to call it), which is to be distinguished from *partiality*. Teamwork primarily means making purposeful agreements on how to proceed during an ImQM, during common briefings, perhaps.[3]

The second article by Keselman et al. (2010) deals with interpreter-mediated asylum hearings and uses discourse analysis to explore this setting. Examining a corpus of 51 non-repair side-sequences in 26 hearings with Russian-speaking, asylum-seeking children in Sweden, their study revealed how children were disempowered. Side-sequences in this context are defined as monolingual dyadic sequences between one primary party (the minor or the caseworker) and the interpreter (Keselman et al., 2010: 88). Their data show how the voice of the child was either guided or excluded from the interaction (Keselman et al., 2010: 89). This can be a "dangerous" evolution because "if interpreters or caseworkers see children as having less power and control in asylum hearings, they may feel less constrained when investigating their asylum claims and be more tolerant of each other's role behaviour" (Keselman et al., 2010: 101).

Other publications on managing ImQM, all by Lisa Aronson Fontes (2005, 2008, 2009, 2010), came to our attention later. These publications point to language-related pitfalls and issues that arise while working with diverse families, such as how to ask which language they prefer to be used in interviews, risks to be on the lookout for, and when an interpreter should be involved. These valuable contributions tackle the most fundamental issues: the use of a professionally trained interpreter instead of informal interpreters; how to prepare interpreters (briefing); the role of the interpreter; different modes of interpretation (consecutive

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1 Though it may seem obvious, 15 years later, Andrews and Lamb (2017) report that lawyers are still not adapting complex questions when prompting children of different ages. This is also the case for a study on child-responsive courts in four legal systems (England, Finland, Norway and the USA), where findings show that there is room for improvement in the use of child-friendly language (Duerr Berrick, 2018).

2 One finding of the questionnaire of CMIQ-I was that other professionals give a lot of responsibility to the interpreter during the encounter, including the responsibility of adapting the language of the translation to the child's level.

3 The lack of mutual knowledge and the perception of common briefings as an unfulfilled need for teamwork came out as another crucial finding of the questionnaire.

and simultaneous); and post-interview discussion (debriefing). These issues also came to the fore in our questionnaire during CMIQ-I.

2.2 A new wave of studies: advancing knowledge on ImQM

When the second project (CMIQ-II)[4] was designed, EU Directive 2016/800 on procedural safeguards for children who are suspects or accused persons in criminal proceedings (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2016) had been just issued. The new legal framework was a result of increased awareness of the issues surrounding ImQM, which also caused academic publications (mostly in psychology) and NGO reports to flourish. Now able to rely on wider research, our aims went beyond criminal proceeding into the realm of administrative law, including asylum proceedings and interviews with unaccompanied minors.

Academic publications stress the need for guidelines (e.g. in Child Advocacy Centers in the United States, see Aronson Fontes & Tishelman, 2016) or discuss the challenges of using interpreters in child sexual abuse interviews from the point of view of the interviewers (Powell, Manger, Dion, & Sharman, 2017), who strongly recommend more specialised training for interpreters. In so doing, they forget that the interpreter is not alone in the setting and that interpreter users also need training in working with interpreters. Others, like Costa (Costa, 2011; Costa & Briggs, 2014; Costa, 2016a, 2016b, 2017), focus on the need for joint training and team efforts of counsellors and interpreters, which can be seen as a very good example of how to manage ImQM in other settings, such as the questioning of vulnerable children in legal settings (in police domains, for instance). A few years earlier, La Rooy and co-authors (La Rooy, Ahern, & Andrews, 2015: 113-131) included some reflections and suggestions on the use of interpreters in forensic interviews in their chapter on appropriate interviewing of highly vulnerable children, and refer to the NICHD-protocol (La Rooy et al., 2015: 123-125). They specifically point to the need for further studies: "given the lack of research, we are left to speculate about the effects of interpreters in investigative interviews" (2015: 124). A few years later, Böser and La Rooy (2018), both of whom were involved in CMIQ-I, outlined some possible modifications to the NICHD protocol for bilingual interaction (NICHD, 2010).

On the ground, (some) NGOs seem to have picked up on this evolution, both in legal (Pro Jus) and administrative contexts (UNICEF). The Pro Jus report (Naik, 2016), carried out within the framework of a European Project, clearly refers to the 2010/64/EU Directive and expands on it by summarising the content and reporting on the directive's ineffective transposition. The latest Belgian UNICEF report (2018) also gives the floor to migrant children, specifically mentioning the fact that interpreters are seldom used and not always reliable, creating situations which lead to isolation, exactly the opposite of integration. Even though only a few children spoke in their testimonies about the figure of the interpreter, when they did so, the minors claimed the interpreter either failed to understand their message or failed to do their job and interfered (2018: 69-70). This was illustrated with one distressing testimony in particular: "the interpreter does the job of the superintendent but not his own job as interpreter. They told us: 'it is not true, you are not 16 or 17 years old, you are 18, full stop'. When they speak like that, they are not interpreters anymore" (2018: 69).

Finally, in the Council of the Baltic State Secretariat's (Wenke & Heiberg, 2015b, 2015a, 2016) instrumental report, very few lines of reflection are dedicated to interpreters, their professionalism, their role and their place in the context of the best interests of the child in transnational child protection cases. The presence of an interpreter, or at least the consideration of the need for one is intrinsically linked to transnationality and communication. When people, whether adults or minors, arrive in a country, for a more or less permanent stay, they rarely speak the language of the host country immediately and fluently. This is certainly the case for vulnerable populations fleeing from war and violence, disasters associated with extreme climate change, poverty or political persecution and to a greater extent for children, especially as unaccompanied minors.

This review shows that further research is needed.

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4 CMIQ-II ran from September 2016 until August 2018.

3 CMIQ-II: interviewing children

The results of our previous research indicated a lack of mutual knowledge about the tasks and responsibilities of all professionals involved in ImQM. The interpreter's role is the least understood among the interview participants, despite the fact that the figure of the interpreter is a crucial link to making communication possible. The interpreter also requires specialised training, as suggested by several authors (see part 2). This unfamiliarity seemed to engender a lack of trust among the interview participants who partnered with interpreters, whether police officers, youth judges, youth lawyers or psychologists. Consequently, as expressed by the respondents, there exists an urgent need to build this trust. If trust does not exist among the interviewers, as described above, how can a child have trust in the situation and how can the interview proceed to truth-finding/solutions? When designing CMIQ-II, this urgent need for better teamwork (briefing and debriefing, trust) and more (specialised) training were key issues which formed the basis for the idea of an interprofessional joint training model. This model facilitates learning more about the other professionals' needs in order to work well together in delicate ImQM settings.

In designing this joint training model, several qualitative methods were applied, namely focus group discussions with the aforementioned stakeholders in ImQM in the different partner countries (Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy) and semi-structured interviews (SSI) with children in a quasi-experimental setting which revealed potentially significant ways to reconfigure and reconceptualise the expected role of the interpreter.

In the following methodological section, we will present the design of the SSI and the design of the quasi-experiment itself, including explanations related to the participants and relevant ethical issues. Results of the SSI will then be identified and discussed.

3.1 SSI of children: methodology

The design of our study and its implementation was prepared and approved by the Belgian research team, and the research ethics committee of KU Leuven obtained approval for the informed consent form to be signed by the parents and the children. In the case of the youngest children, who were not yet able to read or write, their parents signed on their behalf. In all other cases, both minors and parents signed the informed consent. There was no formal assent procedure, but all minors were advised during recruitment, again upon arrival and prior to beginning the actual quasi-experiment, that they could withdraw at any moment, without consequences. This was also officially stated in the informed consent and repeated orally. Participating children were aged between 5 and 17, all monolingual Dutch speakers of mixed gender (6 boys, 6 girls). They all came from upper-middle class backgrounds, meaning that their parents were educated and actively employed with no apparent financial challenges. Except for one deaf child, none of the children had ever had experiences with interpreters (see Annex I for an overview of the participants). The interviews with the hearing children were conducted at our faculty on 21 December 2016, and at the home of the deaf child on 19 January 2017. Priority was given to the home of the deaf child, on consideration of the practical issues (mobility and agendas), with the parents' consent. Each interview session was divided into two parts: (1) the interpreter-mediated questioning of the child (ImQM, experimental part); and (2) the research interview (semi-structured interview) with the child.

The objective of the ImQM was to provide the children with the experience of a witness interview, imitating as much as possible the interview style applied with minors. For this quasi-experiment, a bilingual interaction was simulated and, to enable communication, a professional female interpreter (one Hungarian-Dutch, one Italian-Dutch, one Flemish Sign Language-Dutch) was present. The interviewer was also female, except in the case of the deaf child.

On the days of the actual interviews, the researchers explained in a general but very clear way to the children what was going to happen ("you are going to see a short movie and afterwards somebody is going to ask you some questions about it") and stressed that they could withdraw at any moment. Next, a 3-minute video clip, with no voice-over or text, was shown of a pickpocket stealing the wallet of a deaf woman. No explicit violence was included in the clip.

During the ImQM-part, the minors were placed in the role of witness and received open, non-suggestive questions from the interviewer, who was presented as such (not as a "police officer" or another authority) so that the minors could answer freely with open prompts (see La Rooy et al., 2015). Questions were asked in Hungarian or Italian by an interviewer who did not understand Dutch: both children and interviewer therefore needed an interpreter, who was present but was not introduced officially. The children knew about the interpreter's presence from the prior explanation given by the researcher at their homes ("What is this experiment about?"), from the informed consents and from the introduction given by the researchers immediately before the session. The interpreter employed two interpreting modes: consecutive, and simultaneous whispering. It must be stressed that all the interpreters were professionally trained interpreters, meaning that they were all certified sworn legal interpreters, who had received 150 hours of training and examinations in legal knowledge, police interviewing techniques, legal terminology and interpreting. A short break was provided before the research interview. The goal of the research interview was to discuss with the children the experience they had in communicating with an interpreter, which will be explored below. Questions in the SSI (semi-structured interviews) were structured according to seven themes: personal feelings, relationships between the persons in the room, competence of the people in the room, seating arrangements, technical implementation of the interview (i.e. interpreting mode), trust and rapport, and finally, other special feedback remarks provided by the children. The scheme of the SSI can be found in Annex II.

The researchers had to be trained and well prepared for the sensitive child interviewing session and be aware of the Terre des Hommes Child Safeguarding Policy.[5] An online training session was provided for all project partners by Terre des Hommes Hungary, a member of the research team. In this way, the researchers were aware of how to deal with a distressed respondent as well as how to cope with an emotionally challenging situation, and eventually were able to understand and recognise vulnerability issues.

For the analysis, all interviewees were assigned a code (M1, M2, etc. for girls (*meisje* in Dutch) and J1, J2, etc. for boys (*jongen* in Dutch). Due to the small number of observations and the rather limited amount of data, computer programs like Atlas.ti or NVivo were not considered by the research team. The decision was made to carry out manual analysis according to the following methodology. The individual answers of the children were collated in an Excel workbook, with separate sheets for each research question. This workbook was specifically configured to analyse the results of the semi-structured interviews according to the research matrix. An example of a workbook can be found in Annex III. Similar responses were grouped together and highlighted in the same colour. The main ideas were summarised in the first column of each sheet. Common narratives that fit within the respective line of thought were listed next to it, separated from those which did not fit into any identifiable category, and illustrated by quotes. Essential keywords were included in the last column. The outcomes of this analysis were checked by two other members of the Belgian team at a later stage.

The most salient findings will be discussed in the section below. Since the aim of this research is to give a voice to the children themselves, we will make frequent use of quotations to demonstrate the main points of our analysis.

4 Results

Results will be presented according to the themes that constitute the basic structure of the interview. The first three themes (I: personal feelings; II: role/relations between persons in the room; and III: competence of the people involved, see Annex II) will be clustered in 4.1, because they are closely connected and cannot be presented extensively due to length restrictions. In section 4.2, we will highlight questions 5 and 6 under theme 2: "Who did you describe the video to, the interviewer or the interpreter?", and "Who listened more carefully to you, the interviewer or the interpreter?" These questions are also related to the overarching theme of trust. The other three themes (IV: spatial organisation; V: technical implementation; and VI: trust/ rapport) will be presented separately, in sections 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5, respectively.

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5 Terre des Hommes is an international NGO with headquarters in Switzerland and the policy slogan: "Helping children worldwide". The organisation's health, protection and emergency relief programmes provide assistance to over three million children and their families in more than 45 countries each year. See: https://www.tdh.ch/en. For the Child Safeguarding Policy, see: https://www.tdh.ch/en/media-library/documents/child-safeguarding-policy

4.1 Themes 1-3: personal feelings, role and competence of the people in the room

As mentioned above, with the exception of the deaf child, none of the children had any experience with interpreters: they all found it to be a (very) positive experience which they characterised as "funny, special, normal", "weird" (one child) or "don't know" (one child). They all understood the role of the interpreter very well, felt as if they could ask for repetition or clarification, and felt at ease. This is rather remarkable, particularly since they had no previous experiences with an interpreter (with the exception of the deaf girl). This can be explained, however, by the fact that the participants had received clear preparation about what was going to happen, i.e. that they would be taking part in an interview with an "interpreter" who would make understanding possible. The task of the interpreter was therefore correctly perceived by ten participants as "to translate", "to enable communication" and to assure "language transfer". The minors were impressed by the interpreter's knowledge of the foreign language and therefore had genuine trust in the interpretation.

What was generally stressed the most was the fact that the interviewer, despite not understanding what the children were saying, still used back-channel markers such as "yah, aha, ahum, mmm, right, ok", made eye contact, and used the children's names. While hearing children appreciated the eye contact with the other language speaker, this was not at all necessary for the deaf child:

> *For me, it is not important what the hearing person is doing [...] I do not look at the interviewer because I do not understand her. I only look at the interpreter. I do understand her.* (Deaf girl, 11)

Of particular importance to this study are the children's answers to questions 5 and 6 of theme II, which we will look at in the following subsection.

4.2 Theme 2: questions 5 and 6 highlighted

These questions address the issue of relationships between interlocutors. Primary interlocutors (in this case, child and interviewer) in an interpreter-mediated setting are supposed to address each other. The answers show us that children speak mainly to the interpreter instead.

Questions 5, "Who did you describe the video to, the interviewer or the interpreter?)" was answered as follows:

Interpreter	Interviewer	Both	Don't know
9 (75%)	0	3 (25 %)	0

Figure 1: Answers to question 5

This shows that, of the people in the triad, the interpreter was the person most often primarily addressed by the child.

However, the narratives explain that some children were initially confused as to who to address, while for others it was clear:

> *When she asked the question in Hungarian, I listened to her [the interviewer]. But I think I gave my answers to the interpreter* (Boy, 16).

> *[...] when I noticed that the interviewer was looking at me I thought, 'Oops, I have to talk to her, too'. So, in the beginning, I was really talking to the interpreter, but when I noticed she [the interpreter] was not speaking to me directly either, I shifted my talking to the interviewer.* (Girl, 17)

Other narratives suggest that the motivation of a child to talk to either interviewer or interpreter can be very personal and arbitrary: one seven-year-old boy, for example, reported that he talked to the interpreter in a kind of reaction of familiarity and trust because his babysitter had the same name.

The answers to question 6, namely "Who listened more carefully to you, the interviewer or the interpreter?" can be summarised as follows:

Interpreter	Interviewer	Both	Don't know
1 (8%)	2 (16%)	7 (58%)	2 (16%)

Figure 2: Answers to question 6

Here the dominant answer is for both interviewer and interpreter, with sometimes a slight preference for the interpreter, for obvious reasons, according to one 10-year-old girl:

> *Both. Maybe the interpreter a little bit more because she had to translate anyway.* (Girl, 10)

This was confirmed by one 17-year-old girl, but still with a slight preference for the listening capacity of the interviewer:

> *I think the interviewer. She looked as if she was more interested. […] Also the interpreter of course, because, obviously, she has to translate everything […] but I think the interviewer really was more interested.* (Girl, 17)

4.3 Theme 4: spatial/temporal organisation

Most of the children preferred the seating arrangement with interpreter and interviewer sitting in a typical triad, so the children can see both at the same time. The deaf child stressed that she needed to be in front of the interpreter to be able to see and therefore understand the signed message.

Other seating arrangements meant that, as one child explained, "you need to turn your head all the time" (Girl, 8).

Again, the narratives demonstrate that children can have very arbitrary reasons for changing the seating arrangement. This was the answer of a boy of eleven years old:

> *I would prefer to sit in between them because, when I sit in between two girls, I can make a wish.* (Boy, 11)

When the boy was asked why this was so, the researchers discovered that the idea stemmed from his own fantasy, since for him and his (male) friends this was a superstitious belief or even a fantasy among the boys of his class. This is certainly not a cultural belief but rather appears to be age-specific, and could have been "invented" by their teacher to encourage the boys to sit next to a girl, or in between girls.

4.4 Theme 5: technical implementation of the interview

When asked if they would have preferred a monolingual interview with the interviewer alone, the youngest respondent had a very clear answer:

> *With two it's better than with three. It is quite difficult with three.* (Girl, 5 years old)

Other narratives evinced trust in the interpreter's capacity and the fact that there was no choice:

> *That would probably have been easier, but I think it was about the same because D. [= interpreter] just did everything, exactly everything. I couldn't understand, but I am quite confident that she translated exactly what I said, yes.* (Boy, 13)

> *Yes, of course that would be better, but she is not able to. So, in this case it [= interpreting] is convenient.* (Girl, 12)

As for the interpreting mode, different views were expressed, as can be seen in the figure below:

	SIMULTANEOUS (whispering)	CONSECUTIVE
Preference for	3 (25%) B7y,[1] G7y, G10y	5 (42%) B7y, B9y, B14y, B16y, G17y
Need some time to get used to	1 (8 %) G 12y	
Don't know	3 (25 %) G5y, G10y, B13y	

Figure 3: Preference for simultaneous whispering or consecutive interpreting[6]

The narratives illustrate that, with regard to simultaneous whispering, the opinion of the children was divided. As we can see from the comments, the children were positive, doubtful, or rather against it, as the following narratives reveal:

> Because she [= interviewer] will know immediately what I said. (Girl, 7)

> *I think it's not that bad, but I would have preferred to hear it [= what was said] myself as well.* (Boy, 9)

> *I didn't like the first thing [= whispering], because I was still talking and then she was talking to her as well. […]. And so, I thought, yeah, I am going to speak up a bit, but I wasn't able to concentrate really well, because she was talking to her as well.* (Girl, 17)

The children seemed more positive about the consecutive interpreting technique. Almost half the children (five) said they would prefer consecutive interpreting on a future occasion:

> *And I thought it was better when she was writing because then I could actually tell her everything and think it through once more. (…) because then I had to explain where the shopping thing was in the centre. And then she drew this somehow, so that yeah, she could also get a better idea of what she was actually explaining that way, I thought that was very good.* (Girl, 17)

> *(…) I think it would be easier to work in turns because then I think you can first listen to that person and then to the interpreter.* (Boy, 14)

The deaf child chose simultaneous interpreting, which is the interpreting mode most frequently used for sign languages.

Even though adults sometimes fear that note-taking by the interpreter will be distracting for the child and disrupt his or her attention, this idea has not been confirmed. The children saw note-taking as a necessary tool to enhance the memory of the interpreter. Even the young children had an understanding of the consecutive technique and grasped why the interpreter should write down some ideas:

> *I thought it was quite smart, that she was writing it down. Because otherwise she would have to remember it and then she would forget it…* (Boy, 9)

The opinion of the children on the interpreting mode was divergent, indicating a need to decide which mode will be used before starting an interview, and how to switch to another mode if the child does not seem to feel comfortable with one mode or the other.

4.5 Theme 6: trust and rapport… with whom?

Having asked about general personal feelings towards the people in the room (who did you speak to, who listened to you more), with this question we dug a little deeper into the concept of trust. The topic examined here helped us to reflect on how the interviewer can gain the trust of the minor and build rapport through the interpreter. In concertation with our child rights expert and forensic psychologist, we did this by asking the younger minors with whom they would share a chocolate or a drawing, while asking the older minors (aged

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6 In the table, *B* stands for *boy*, *G* stands for *girl* and *y* stands for *years old*.

12 and over) with whom they would share a secret. Most children seemed to be willing to share sweets or secrets (and therefore intimacy, trust) with the interpreter, but not with the interviewer:

	Interpreter	Interviewer	Both	Don't know
Secret	8 (80 %)	1 (10 %)	/	1 (10 %)
Drawing/chocolate	2 (40 %)	1 (20 %)	/	2 (40 %)

Figure 4: Question about trust: Person with whom children would share a secret/chocolate/drawing

On the one hand, the children revealed themselves as highly pragmatic, seeing the interpreter as the only person they could explain their case to, because of the shared language:

> *Because if I had to tell it to P. [interviewer], D. [= interpreter] would automatically know.* (Girl, 10)

> *If I had to try to explain this in Hungarian [...] or in English, so then perhaps it would be less clear [...] than if I told it to the interpreter.* (Boy, 16)

> *If she [interviewer] could understand my language, I would tell it to P. [interviewer]. But then I would also ask her not to tell it to anyone else.* (Boy, 9)

However, the children also made comments that revealed their understanding of concepts like confidentiality. For example, in the following excerpts, the interpreter is seen as a kind of buffer, in the sense that the children seem to deposit trust and rapport with the interpreter, rather than with the interviewer:

> *[...] then you are not telling it directly to the interviewer, but to the interpreter. (...) Yeah, I don't know, I think it's more confidential. That is... then you don't have to tell it directly to the interviewer, if you have done something, for example. It's easier if [= the interpreter] then tells it to the interviewer.* (Boy, 14)

> *[...] I think that when you are involved in a conversation with her for some time, after a while you can tell whether you can trust her or not. But if she asked that question straight away when you have never seen or spoken to her before, in that case I would find it difficult.* (Girl, 16)

The oldest girl who participated highlighted the gender issue. At 17 and nearly an adult woman, she would prefer a female to a male interpreter:

> *Yes, I think, if it's a woman, you're both women, eh. And yes, it may sound ridiculous, but in that case you are perhaps more on the same wavelength. But if it's a man, it's a bit like [...]*

5 Discussion and limitations of the research

Before discussing the results of this particular aspect of a larger project, we wish to draw attention to its obvious limitations. First of all, the number of interviews was limited to only 12, and general conclusions on how children feel in ImQM cannot therefore be drawn. However, without overstating its scope, this qualitative method reveals some important issues for consideration. As we have already stated, our main goal is to give a voice to the children themselves, which is why we have used quotations of the children's opinions to illustrate the main points of this study.

Secondly, the interviews were held in a safe environment with children who, to our knowledge, had not undergone any traumatising experiences, at least not the ones we see in relation to children fleeing violence, war, hunger, extreme fear and stress. The experimental design required that the research team obtain permission from the research ethics committee at KU Leuven and adhere to the previously mentioned child safeguarding policy. Moreover, the age differences of the children (aged between 5 and 17) were significant, although this does reflect real-life ImQM circumstances. The social background of our cohort, however, did not mirror such circumstances, as all the minors interviewed were from middle- to upper-class families. Variety in this parameter could indeed offer different conclusions.

Our results do not confirm Matthias & Zaal (2002)'s findings on the inability of the interpreter to relate or communicate properly with minors, leading to simplification, interference and inappropriate behaviour (such as laughing). This is probably due to the fact that we were operating in an experimental, less distressing

setting, and because we worked exclusively with professional interpreters, which was not the case some 15 years ago in South Africa, as stated by the authors.

On the contrary, trust in the interpreter in our case was very high and the children mostly addressed the interpreter (or both the interpreter and the interviewer) rather than the interviewer, and were confident that both were listening. We also saw that the children would be more willing to share a chocolate, a drawing or a secret with the interpreter. Again, we dare to credit this to the professionalism of the interpreter, which the children acknowledge, perhaps intuitively. Children are often seen as vulnerable and not fully developed, which is of course correct from a developmental, biological point of view, but this should not be confused with children being naïve or ignorant. As seen in the Belgian UNICEF report, children know very well when interpreters are interfering or overstepping their role. From the moment the interpreter decided to change the age of the child in the instance quoted earlier, the child realised that "When they speak like that, they are not interpreters anymore" (UNICEF, 2018: 69).

The professionalism of the interpreter can also explain the fact that, unlike in Keselman et al. (2010), where side sequences between the interpreter and the interviewer were defined as excluding or guiding the voice of the children, the minors felt as if they had understood everything, that they were listened to, and that they could ask for clarification, if necessary. In other words, they felt they had a voice.

We wish to stress in this discussion that the professionalism of the interpreter is crucial, as stated by Aronson and Matthias & Zaal. Of course, this was already a founding principle of CMIQ-I in 2014: for other professionals (legal actors, police officers, psychologists and child support workers) to be able to trust the interpreter, they must be sure the interpreter is a trained and certified professional, as they are.

Next, the need for a briefing with the whole team responsible for the ImQM, including the interpreter, came to the fore as a result of CMIQ-I. A briefing is necessary to briefly explain the situation to the interpreter, decide with the leading interviewer on the interpreter's role (including codes of ethics and limitations), share information on interviewing techniques (open and closed questions), respect moments of silence, and discuss possible interpreting modes (consecutive or simultaneous), as also stated by Aronson Fontes (2005, 2008, 2009, 2010). Such rationale for team briefings also became patently clear in the results of our experiment. The interpreter can clearly only be considered a fully-fledged member of the professional ImQM team as a trained and accredited interpreter.

One thorny issue remains, however, regarding the possible influence the briefing can have on the interpreter's impartiality, as suggested in Goodman-Delahunty & Howes (2019). As indicated after the first project, a considered solution is to have a technical briefing on the planned interview strategies: on use of the first person, the seating arrangement, the interpreting mode, possible challenges with children's language, as well as any issues related to the content of the case, especially in the event that specific special needs issues need to be raised without the interviewer losing the lead in the interaction.

We must be aware of the fact that more than one person in the room can be distressing for the minor (as confirmed by the 5-year-old girl who found: *With two it's better than with three. It's quite difficult with three*), which means that interviewer and interpreter must trust each other and work as a team to achieve a successful outcome to the interview and not aggravate what is already a stressful situation for the child.

Finally, all stakeholders have to take into consideration the mind and thoughts of the minor, who, as a fully-fledged individual, may have a very personal reason why they prefer one person or one interpreting mode to another, or why they favour a certain seating arrangement. We like to recall a perfect illustration of these possible personal feelings and thoughts in the seven-year-old boy's answer about his babysitter's name: he preferred to trust the interpreter, simply because she had the same name as his babysitter (whom he apparently trusted).

6 Conclusion

This contribution aimed to shed light on the perception of interpreters through the eyes of children taking part in an ImQM, and on whether children see the interpreter as a person with whom they can relate and build rapport. This seems to be the case: children relate more to the interpreter than to the interviewer.

Following our SSI outcomes, however, we also see a positive effect on the interaction when the interviewer shows interest, seeks eye-contact, communicates with the children through body language (nodding) or confirmation markers ("ahum, yes, aha"), and treats them like people by using their names. This rapport-building with the interviewer should be facilitated through interviewer behaviour, and seating arrangements are as important as the interpreting mode: if the child does not feel comfortable with one or another mode, their narratives or prompts are hampered and it is difficult for them to say what they need to say (the truth). This was shown in their hesitations about whether they should stop talking or talk louder in the case of simultaneous interpreting, or in the answer about the time gained during consecutive interpreting to think further about their answer(s), "because then I could actually tell her everything and think it through once more" (Girl, 17).

We can conclude that rapport-building with the interviewer must be encouraged, but also that we must take into account the children's reality and their perceptions. This should be discussed in a briefing before starting the actual interview, so that everybody's role is clear to all the professionals involved in the ImQM.

Nilsen's words (2013) reflect our own views:

> It is therefore imperative that the professional adult interpreter user, the child's dialogue partner, has strategies for attracting and maintaining the child's attention, since children, like adults who are inexperienced interpreter users, are likely to direct their attention towards the person speaking and understanding their language. (Nilsen, 2013: 27-28)

This can only be achieved if all the stakeholders involved in ImQM are aware of the circumstances of interpreter-mediated questioning, in particular, that children show an intuitive tendency to trust the interpreter, the person they can understand, and that such behaviour poses serious questions about the convenience of the "interpreter-as-a-machine" categorisation. By embracing children's perceptions, interpreters can be instrumental in promoting mutual trust among all participating agents. Open communication about the roles of both interviewer and interpreter can be developed in briefings at which the interpreter is presented as a professional member of the team; interviewers can also use appropriate body language and discourse markers to accentuate their listening attitude. As CMIQ-II suggests, awareness of all stakeholder's roles in ImQM can best be achieved through joint training,[7] whereby interviewers and other stakeholders learn to use interpreters to convey a sense of trust to minors while maintaining their role as leader(s) of the interview.

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Appendix I: Overview of gender and age of participants

Age Child	6-9 years	10-13 years	14-17 years
Child	B (7)	G (10)	B (14)
Child	G (7)	B (13)	G (17)
Child	B (9)	G (12)	B (16)
Child	G (5)	B (11) Deaf	
Child	B (7)		

Appendix II: SSI questions

THEME	QUESTIONS
I. **Personal feelings**	Two people just had a conversation with you. During that conversation: 1) How did you feel? (= Are you okay?) 2) What happened in the interview room? Can you explain it to me? 3) What did you like most during the conversation? 4) What did you like most about the interviewer? 5) What did you like most about the interpreter? 6) Was there anything you didn't like about them? (If yes) What was it? => or ask the child if we should do the interview again, if he/she wants to change something or make it better

II. **Role / relationship between persons in the room**	1) There were different people present.
	
	    a) Describe them.
	
	    b) What were they doing?
	
	2) Do you think they (according to the description, the interviewer and the interpreter) know each other?
	
	3) How did you feel about the interviewer?
	
	4) How did you feel about the interpreter?
	
	5) Who did you describe what happened in the video to, the interviewer or the interpreter?
	
	6) Who listened to you more carefully, the interviewer or the interpreter?

III.	Capacity (competence of the people involved)	1) Why do you think the interpreter was there? Can you explain it to me?
		2) Could you understand everything the interpreter said or asked you?
		3) Did you say everything you wanted to say?
		4) Did you get the opportunity to ask for something to be repeated if you needed it?
		5) Was there anything you didn't understand? (If yes) Tell me what you didn't understand.
		6) Did you get the opportunity to ask for something you didn't understand very well to be explained to you, if you needed it?
IV.	Spatial/temporal organisation	1) The interpreter was sitting 'over there'. Do you remember? Where would you like the interpreter to sit next time?
		2) Why?
V.	Technical implementation of the interview	1) Would you prefer to have communicated *with the interviewer* in the same (= your) language?
		2) The interpreter was doing some things. Do you remember? Things like whispering or taking notes. What did you think of the interpreter whispering?
		3) What did you think of the interpreter taking notes?
		4) What would you like the interpreter to do next time?
		5) If the interpreter interrupted you sometimes, what did you think about that?
VI.	Trust/rapport	1) If you had a secret (this has nothing to do with the video clip you saw), which person would you tell it to?
		-> Interviewer reaction: *"That's interesting. Tell me more about that. / Can you explain why?"*
		* For 6-9-years old: Draw a picture about the interview.
VII.	General feedback	Is there anything else you want to share?

Appendix III: Excel workbook analysis data

Interview Questions ↓	Common narratives	Unusual narratives	Keywords (related to previous research & training)	Related hypothesis Approved/not approved/need more data	Quotation	CMIQ & Connecting data
IQ 1						
…						
…						
…						
IQ 2						