



## **FEEDBACK ON JOINT TRAINING FOR INTERPRETERS AND POTENTIAL JOB PROVIDERS IN LEGAL SETTINGS**

**By Sophie Man-  
Cheung, Freelance  
Arabic Interpreter,  
MSc Trans., NRPSI,  
Member of AIT who  
specialises in areas of  
immigration and  
legal interpreting**

I won't ever forget how invaluable my day was, spent with police officers doing crisis intervention training. As an Arabic interpreter, my role in the simulated scenario was to interpret between the hostage-taker and police negotiators. Here, I aim to reflect on certain aspects of how this experience helped me prepare for future interpreting work. In this high-octane environment, I found myself dealing with challenges requiring skills of greater emotional control than I had previously encountered in the calmer, more controlled environments I was used to working in, such as police stations and courts. For instance, on that day I was constantly reminded that with a hostage involved, I had become the 'channel' influencing an outcome that could end fatally. I daresay the involvement with this kind of fear-factor could be something that may put others off, yet in all honesty the pressure was something I found both frightening and fascinating at the same time. In the simulation, the 'hostage-taker' was Egyptian. The speed of his dialect presented me with an additional challenge which those who are non-native Arabic speakers (or native Arabs who grew up outside the Arabic world) would more readily relate to: I was dealing with a supposed life or death situation and having to concentrate harder on a dialect not consistent with the Modern Standard Arabic I trained in. In fact the above challenge is part of the salient debate as to how one should aim to professionally develop to render the kind of frenzied, dialectal Arabic, specific to the training day, bearing in mind that Arabic is technically a 'macro-language' with some 30 different variations.

On that day, I mustered as much calm, at least outwardly as I could, with all the knowledge to interpret to the best of my knowledge and skills (as one would say on oath in court), having done all I could to be prepared, i.e. working on a glossary containing related terms I envisaged would be needed. Nevertheless, the 'real-time' emotional control and ability to deal with a dialect within a language, which is not one's own native tongue, are certainly two aspects I feel interpreters can often relate to as being aspects one cannot so tangibly and easily prepare for. I believe that what made the day so memorable was that it gave me the impetus out of what seemed challenging and fear-provoking at the time, to be better equipped in my full-time interpreting role following the training: working in a highly volatile context with vulnerable individuals and groups. On at least one occasion during this period I found myself interpreting for a potentially life or death situation. By then I was privileged to be able to draw upon those invaluable training skills: to maintain emotional control, allowing the inward sense of fear to be calmed. I feel this response contributed positively to the reduction of tensions and restoration of calm. On reflection, potential 'negatives' and fearful experiences can become great positives, as they contribute to the factors building valuable experience. I truly believe this is the stuff of what has motivated me and countless other interpreters to move forward with all the means available to us to keep improving and growing professionally..