

# *The Importance of Intonation in Establishing Rapport in a Hungarian- English Counselling Session*

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Data: 40 minute consultation between a Hungarian speaking psychologist and an English speaking client with a professional interpreter.

After the session, it emerged that both the psychologist and client were unhappy with the consultation and that they did not feel that they had managed to establish a positive relationship with one another.

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Psychologist:

*“I felt that the client was uncomfortable with me. I felt that she was establishing a relationship with the interpreter rather than with me”*

Client:

*“I felt that she was direct and abrupt”*

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# *What went wrong?*

Methodology:

Hungarian and English native speakers were asked to judge utterances by the psychologist and interpreter which were deemed particularly problematic by the participants.

Respondents were asked to comment on what they felt the intention and attitude of the speakers were, and how they would rephrase these if they wanted to change a particular attitude.

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**Client:** Eh (...) I've kind of (.) gone through lots of life changes recently I've changed a lot of things in my life and I'm finding it quite unsettling↗

**Int:** Eh nagyon sok minden változott a: közelmúltban az életemben  
*a lot has changed in the recent past in my life*

sok változáson mentem át és eh ez egy kicsikét eh (.) zavarónak (xx) tartom  
*many changes I went through and I found this to be a little (xx) disturbing*

**Co:** Milyen változások  
*what kind of changes*

**Int:** What kind of changes

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*Comments by Hungarian  
native speakers:*

*“professional tone, distanced but kind”*  
*“gentle, encouraging client to give  
more details”*



# *Comments by English native speakers:*

*“seems like abrupt info-seeking”*

*“sounds confrontational and very direct”*

*“quite direct, not very soft, doesn't seem  
kind,*

*as if she were saying 'explain yourself' or  
'get to the point'*

*“direct, not very understanding...”*



## *What happened?*

The English native speakers were asked to rephrase the utterance “what kind of changes” so as not to seem “abrupt, direct, confrontational” etc.

In this way the linguistic “cue” responsible could be uncovered.

(These cues are called “contextualisation cues” after Gumperz (1982))

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The interpreter's rendition was uttered with primary stress on “what” and falling intonation:

WHAT

kind of

chang-

-es



This matches the intonation pattern of the original Hungarian utterance:

MI-

-lyen

válto-

-zások

*[What kinds of changes]*

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English native speaker respondents rephrased  
the utterance with primary stress on “kind” :

What            KIND            of  
   chang-  
   -es



Therefore the contextualisation cues “responsible” for the perceived abruptness and directness of the utterance were the primary stress on “what” and the falling intonation.

Although this was clearly caused by interference of Hungarian intonation on the interpreter's English, the participants judged these as expressing attitude, i.e. *NOT* as constituting mere linguistic errors.

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Also, these attitudes were attributed to the primary conversation participant, i.e. the psychologist, and not the interpreter, suggesting that the interpreter is viewed as a mere “translation machine”.

Also the fact that the misunderstanding was not perceived as a linguistic, but as an “attitude” problem

indicates that speakers are not 'conscious' of the pragmatic features they employ when they speak.

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## ***FINDINGS and COMMENTS***

- **Misunderstandings that can be shown to have LINGUISTIC origin perceived in terms of ATTITUDE.**
  - **Issues with perceived “neutrality” of interpreter and inherent in Codes of Conduct**
  - **Speakers are much more limited in ability to use linguistic tools to establish rapport in interpreter-mediated setting.**
  - **Interpreter to “join” in in this activity?**
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