Intercultural Communication

Training Booklet for Volunteers working in support of refugees and people seeking asylum

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Created by John Twitchin in cooperation with SIETAR UK Project for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum

Intercultural Communication

Training booklet of cultural awareness and practical communication skills needed by volunteers who interact with refugees and people seeking asylum.

This booklet comprises four guides written for use by

- *individual volunteers* **as a 'self-learning mini-course' in intercultural communication**

- *trainers / facilitators* **as stimulus materials to prompt video-based group learning discussions**

This training booklet on Intercultural Communication has been made by the Centre for Intercultural Development for use by volunteers in refugee centres. Copies of the booklet (or of each section 1 – 4 separately), together with copies via 'We Transfer' of the training videos described in 'Talk it over' (p 39 ff), are available on request to cicd.jt@gmail.com

Centre for Intercultural Development (CICD)

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(written in collaboration with Polly Collingridge)

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(guide written with assistance of Linda de Wit)

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(guide written in collaboration with Janina Neumann)

4. **'Talk it Over':** guide to video-based training resources - with exercises, handouts and trainer's notes - to prompt learning discussions on Intercultural Communication

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Centre for Intercultural Development (CICD)

1: Communicating Interculturally with refugees and people seeking asylum - a self-learning guide

written by John Twitchin in collaboration with Polly Collingridge

What is this guide for? How does it help me?

As volunteers know, the biggest single group of refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK are Muslims from Syria, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Yemen, Afghanistan. Overall, however, refugees come from a much wider range of countries - no fewer than 68 countries/regions at the last count - each with its distinctive religion(s), language(s), dialect(s) and background culture(s). Volunteers who are seeking to build rapport with newcomers, and to help them adapt to British society, need to respond positively to the wealth of cultural diversity they bring. This guide supplies the *intercultural awareness* plus *intercultural communication skills* to help achieve this effectively in practice.

Most volunteers take an interest in refugees' cultural background and country of origin, and try to learn some words and phrases of their language: it helps understanding and makes newcomers feel extra-welcome. It's good practice for volunteers to regard refugees as their 'in-house' experts on the cultures and languages the refugees bring from overseas. The toolkit of skills on pp 12 – 14 below is designed to help native-English speakers in communicating with refugees and people seeking asylum, whatever their country of origin, whatever their first language (mother-tongue), and whatever their current level of facility in speaking English. [Follow-up guides offer tips specifically on communicating with speakers of Arabic (p. 18 ff) and of Farsi (p. 33 ff).]

Even after they have acquired basic facility in English as a second or third language, refugees face many *intercultural* communication difficulties in their interactions with volunteers – ie, difficulties that arise not simply because of lack of English vocabulary but because refugees and volunteers have each been brought up in *different cultures.* This guide is not another manual for teaching basic grammar and vocabulary of English language: rather, it focuses on cultural differences in *how words are used to convey meanings*. It aims to help volunteers as native-English speakers to *identify and repair* (*or even better, to prevent*) *the breakdowns of mutual misunderstanding that commonly occur when we are communicating with someone from a cultural background different from our own.*

This first guide (pp 4 – 17) offers clues and tips for recognising misperceptions of meanings and intentions that arise recurrently in intercultural exchanges, creating confusion and irritation *on both sides*. These clues and tips make it easier to contain any impatience or aggravation you may feel in reaction to a refugee's 'difficult' accent, their 'odd' or 'unreasonable' manner, or their unexpected, frustratingly unclear and imprecise way of expressing themselves in English. When we can recognise the possible *intercultural* sources of these irritations, we can better repair the misperceptions and misunderstandings of meanings and intentions that occur in verbal exchanges with refugees – and we can take steps to prevent these from escalating into ill-tempered confrontations, distress, or other damaging interpersonal upsets.

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In reviewing cultural differences, what do we mean by 'culture'?

Many cultural differences are quite obvious: the language people speak, the food they prefer, the way they look or dress, etc. But such overt differences represent only the 'tip of the iceberg' of culture. A mass of subtly different *cultural values, assumptions* and *norms/patterns of behaviour* lie hidden beneath the surface - for example, people's differing religious beliefs and practices; ideas about what constitutes politeness; assumptions about health-keeping or child-rearing practices; attitudes towards the role of women in society; priorities in timekeeping, etc. Whether in formal dialogue or informal conversation with refugees and people seeking asylum, volunteers who are native-English speakers are liable to 'crash into' these hidden dimensions of the 'iceberg' of culture, often entirely without realising it.

To vary the metaphor, when we interact with someone of another culture, we become the proverbial 'fish out of water'. The 'water' is our taken-for-granted norms or 'rules' about *what we should say and how we should behave* in any verbal interaction. We are so used to seeing the world in terms of our own 'cultural filter' that we're hardly aware of it until we encounter people from a different culture. It needs conscious reflection to recognise that the English language is not 'culture-neutral': like people everywhere, we perceive and make sense of the world through our own 'cultural filter'.

Examples of communicating via different 'cultural filters'

1. Naji, a teenager brought up in Homs in Syria, arrived in the USA where he painstakingly cleared away a heavy snowfall for a local woman. She offered him payment for his trouble. But Naji politely turned this down. In Syria this would be a cultural cue for a neighbour to insist he take the money. But, not realising this cultural difference, the American took him at his word – and thereby unwittingly delivered a distressing rebuff.
2. In many cultures it is quite acceptable to turn up a long time after the agreed time for meeting or appointment – unlike countries like Britain or Germany where anything more than about 10 minutes after the agreed time is generally considered 'late': it requires some sort of excuse (duly varied according to the formality of the occasion). But in some cultures, time is viewed as a more fluid and flexible process than we are used to in the UK: turning up even more than an hour 'late' can be quite acceptable, ie, no excuse is required as it's a cultural value to assume that unforeseen events will crop up that need to take priority.

Incidentally, it's important to avoid misleading stereotypical thinking here. Generalisations about cultural differences don't necessarily describe the behaviour of all individuals from another culture. The *average* Ethiopian may consider punctuality to be less important than the average British person, but this is not to say *all* Ethiopians will always arrive later to a meeting than *all* British people. (Cf notes pp 15 – 17 below.)

Thus, when we talk with a newly arrived refugee or person seeking asylum, we need to bear in mind that we've each been brought up and 'socially conditioned' to think and talk via different *'cultural filters'* - they will be bringing varying cultural assumptions and expectations about what is the 'normal' way to behave, or the 'right' thing to say in any particular situation/context.

Why do intercultural misunderstandings happen?

When interacting with refugees and people seeking asylum, we need first to *recognise any misalignments* between our varying 'cultural filters', and second, to *repair any misunderstandings* caused by such misalignments*.* In essence, we need to equip ourselves with the awareness and skills to act as our own 'intercultural mediator' in verbal exchanges with refugees.

1. Such misunderstandings are liable to happen when we judge the behaviour of someone from another culture in terms of the 'normal' values and assumptions of our own culture. This is very easy to do since we're mostly oblivious to how much our perceptions, assumptions and expectations have been 'socialised' by the particular culture we've been brought up in.

2. Misunderstandings may also happen if we don't realise how strongly a refugee's *way of speaking in English* is strongly influenced by cultural characteristics of their mother-tongue. Misunderstandings commonly arise from such 'mother-tongue influences': ie, when a refugee's way of speaking English replicates the grammatical, intonational, and 'body language' patterns of their first language. (Case-study examples of Arabic and Farsi are set out in Guides 2 and 3 below.)

3. Of course, some misunderstandings result from clashes of *personality* (ie, some people are shy, some are extravert and fast-talking etc.). In fact, we're so familiar with how misperceptions of people's meanings and intentions can arise from personality clashes (and sometimes gender differences) within our own culture, that in interacting with other cultures we can easily attribute any irritating uncertainty about what a refugee means to their *personality* - when in fact, it may be more to do with their *culturally different style of speaking in English*.

Symptoms of intercultural linguistic misunderstanding

Most volunteers have experience of communicating with people in or from different cultures: they know that nothing expresses the essence of a culture more than its language - the way people communicate together. They accept the need to speak English more slowly than normal - and they anticipate that refugees' values and behaviours are going to differ considerably from British norms. Taking such an open-minded approach to cultural differences helps us to regard foreign languages and varying cultural values, behaviours and styles of communication, in positive terms (as valued, interesting, enriching) rather than in negative terms (as 'cultural deficits', 'faults', or only as 'problems to be dealt with').

However, interacting with people culturally different from ourselves is not always easy - *it almost inevitably produces irritation or stress from time to time*. Impatience and aggravation are a natural reaction when we're trying to persuade someone to do things differently, or when we're trying to explain a procedure to a refugee or person seeking asylum who is disconcertingly expressing themself in English in ways we're not expecting. We can be left feeling uncertain whether they are actually understanding us, and we them - and all the more so, if their manner seems odd or unreasonable (ie, coming across as rudely demanding, or at the other extreme, aggravatingly unforthcoming, or recurrently giving vague answers). But most refugees and people seeking asylum don't intend to be irritating. While they may sense our suppressed frustration, they are unlikely to recognise the difficulty as one of *intercultural* misunderstanding (ie, that this is not a matter of personal dislike but is linguistically correctable).

Difficulties of intercultural misunderstanding and misperception can be triggered at a subliminal level by our reactions to a person's *foreign accent* when speaking in English.

Reacting to foreign accents

Sensitivity to the sounds of language speech patterns is deeply 'hard-wired' in us: even before infants can formulate any words themselves, it's been shown that they prefer the sound of native speakers of their parents' language rather than of non-native speakers.

A foreign accent can influence how native-speakers form judgments about a foreign person's cultural affiliation or educational level. Negative bias can be triggered because native-English speakers generally find it harder to understand someone speaking with a foreign accent: their utterances are about 30% longer; they often contain many pauses and/or are 'stilted' in rhythm; individual sounds of vowels and consonants differ from those they are used to; and in many languages, intonational stress is confusingly located differently both within words and on words in a sentence.

Rather worryingly, research by linguists has shown that native-speakers of English commonly believe that a statement is less true if it is said with a foreign accent.

It's a difficulty that feelings of irritation with someone who has a strong foreign accent, or who uses English in a confusing and unclear way, are *gut reactions*, not the result of rational thought. Such reactions can influence what we do or say next, even before we are fully aware of them. As a result, instead of identifying and clearing up intercultural misunderstandings (ie, by carefully unravelling any misalignment of our 'cultural filters') we can, without realising it, act on our feelings and compound any misperceptions of the meanings we want to convey, and thereby unwittingly create aggravation and/or sow mistrust.

   Reaction/Action

   we sense aggravation/uncertainty

   we act/do something impulsively in response

   a negative outcome

It's a key skill therefore, not to allow any disconcerting *feelings* about how someone speaks in English to influence what we *do* next. If confusion arises in talking with a refugee, we may privately blame them for creating misgivings and discomfort for us – but *they* may be feeling equally uncomfortable, negatively blaming *us* for creating unsettling uncertainty for them. Once we can trace how different cultures have varying styles of communication, especially in *how words in English are used to convey meanings*, we can recognise and interpret situations more accurately. Here are 12 'tools of analysis': ie, cultural contrasts in how language is used around the world. Reflecting on how far each of these applies in our intercultural talk helps us to step back from acting on 'gut reactions', and to consider other cultural explanations for what's

happening when we sense that a refugee is being 'difficult', or has a style of using English that we find unexpected, unsettling, odd or confusing.

12 cultural contrasts in intercultural communication

1. **High or Low Context**

In verbal exchanges, cultures differ in the extent to which people are expected to 'read between the lines' (high context) in order to pick up an intended meaning, rather than using words to carry their meaning explicitly (low context). Refugees from 'high context' cultures are likely to expect us to *infer* what they mean, and how they feel, without expressing themselves as overtly and directly as is usual in the UK. (High versus low context is relative: UK is 'higher context' than US, but much lower context than E. Asian.)

2. **Direct or Indirect**

Cultures also differ in how people reply to questions, make statements, ask about things, or express/manage disagreement. The customary British style is more directly straightforward compared with the Arabic and Asian indirect 'narrative' or 'proverbial' style of talking, which avoids precise specifics and the negativity of 'No' by using face-saving hints. [Again, cultural directness and indirectness is relative: eg, Direct US: 'I'm off now'; Less direct UK: 'I think it's time I left'; Indirect East Asian: 'We won't bother you any more'.] Bear in mind that 'Yes' to someone from a more indirect culture than British may mean only 'I hear you' or 'It would be unkind to disagree', rather than that they agree with a statement or are committed to an action. (More on indirectness: cf p. 24)

3. **Turn-taking style**

Some cultures (especially, for example, Greek or Israeli) have a style of talking that incorporates overlapping speech much more than is typical in the UK. For them, interrupting is not felt as 'pushy' or rude – rather, it signals engagement and involvement. By contrast, in many Asian cultures 'silence is golden': gaps of silence in conversation are perfectly acceptable (as well as for speakers of Arabic or Finnish), while the British tend to find silences awkward and seek to fill them. (More detail on handout, p 68.)

4. **Formal or Informal styles of greeting/respect**

Some cultures tend to be distant and guarded in greeting people (for them this can be a sign of respect) while others are warm/chatty. Some are especially respectful to age.

5. **Body Language**

Body language differs greatly between cultures. How close do we choose to stand or sit near each other; what is the meaning of a smile (ie, does it signal warmth, or embarrassment, or anger?); whether to make eye contact or not, and for how long? (ie, are we unwittingly coming across as overly bold or subservient, or as showing respect or not?) Touch and gestures: in Britain we are much less tactile, and rely less on gesticulation, than in many other cultures.

6. <u>Effects of mother-tongue on English as 2<u>nd</u> or 3<u>rd</u> language</u>

Until he/she has become fully bi-cultural, someone learning English as a second or third language is bound to make 'errors' which result from replicating characteristic ways their first (mother-tongue) language is spoken. Such apparent mistakes in English can be made in terms of *grammar, accent, intonation and placing of stress*. (For example, people from India are often heard in the UK as emphasising the 'wrong' syllable in a word or word in a sentence in English (see the exercises on pp 28 – 29 below). People from Eastern Europe are generally more direct (to British ears) when making requests and thereby sound 'rude' or 'demanding' in manner). In both cases, such speakers are being influenced by the grammar and the patterns of placing stress in their first language. Such 'mother-tongue influences' often suggest brusqueness in terms of British cultural standards, even though entirely unintentionally. It's worth bearing in mind that until we become bi-lingual, for everyone our mother-tongue remains the primary language of emotion. (This is why situations that create feelings of stress and anxiety - eg, questioning by police or in a courtroom - can cause a refugee's command of English to 'go out the window', and/or multiply the mistakes they make in speaking English.

7. <u>Politeness forms</u>

When and how to make requests/queries/responses differs across cultures - as does use of 'please' and 'thanks'. British people are famous for 'watching our Ps and Q's', as well as for 'softening' how we express requests (often using complex grammar: 'I wonder if you could please keep the noise down?'). But speakers of other languages cultures can express politeness by using their polite form of 'you' and/or more direct imperative forms, so making words 'please' and 'thank you' less necessary in their mother-tongue. This is why they often overlook these in speaking English.

8. <u>Time: Concepts and Attitudes</u>

Concepts and attitudes about time also vary across cultures. In Western 'linear-time' cultures (eg, UK, US, Germany, Switzerland), punctuality and holding to schedules is valued: 'time is money'. But in more flexible time cultures (eg the 'Middle-East', Africa, India, South America), 'time is relationship'. In those cultures, being adaptable to things fate throws at us is seen as a functional response – ie, dealing with interruptions, or prioritising new challenges as they arise, is accepted, even if people are kept waiting.

9. <u>Low Key or Expressive</u>

How low key or expressive people are, or should be, is also culturally sanctioned. Should emotion be demonstrated and, if so, to what extent? How loudly should you speak? What tone of voice signals anger/rudeness/irritation? How to emphasise a point? What demonstrates animation/involvement? For example, the pitch of talk in Arabic is generally louder than typical English: this is mainly for dramatic effect – such that it can be wrong to assume the speaker is seeking to be more definite about what they are saying. And while a raised voice in the UK might suggest an argument has begun, for Arabic speakers it simply demonstrates sincerity, engagement, enthusiasm.

10. **Ways of structuring information/answers**

Cultures also structure differently the ways they give information and answers. Latin cultures (eg French) train people to focus on principles first – ie, to develop a theoretical or conceptual framework before presenting facts or opinions. But in British culture we tend to begin answers with our key point - whether of fact, statement or opinion - adding any concepts to further explain our conclusion only if this proves necessary. However, Asian cultures prefer a more 'narrative style' that may not appear to be answering the question directly at all: they typically start by giving time to explaining 'the bigger context/picture'; they then leave room for the listener to infer what they mean.

11. **Ways to influence/win confidence/argue persuasively**

Some cultures are more verbose than others (eg, Arabic favours a more rhetorical style).

12. **How differing 'scripts' lead to clashes of cultural filters**

Different cultures have different assumptions about the purpose, the structure, and 'normal' steps (ie, 'rituals of procedure') to be followed in regular interactions [eg, when answering the phone; participating in a workplace meeting or a recruitment interview; consulting a doctor; addressing a police officer, legal adviser or counsellor]. We take for granted how we think each situation 'should' be done or conducted, and what implied actions and outcome can be expected. The term 'script' is used by linguists to describe our 'socialised'/customary ways of talking in such situations - ie, the *regular routines* or 'rituals' that as native-speakers we 'automatically' slip into. Communication difficulties arise because such 'scripts' are different in different cultures; and most of us have learned our 'scripts' *monoculturally*. They are so habitually ingrained that we can get 'stuck' in them and find it difficult and uncomfortable to adapt them when dealing with someone who is operating to a 'script' that is culturally different from what we are used to. In short, we bring culturally different 'scripts' of tacit rules or taken-for-granted assumptions about the *purpose* of an interview or meeting, *what it should comprise* (both what it should cover, and by what procedural steps it should be conducted), *what ways of talking* are appropriate, and *what outcomes can be expected.*

Developing cultural competence

While *awareness* of cultural contrasts is an important first step for volunteers in identifying misunderstandings that arise in verbal exchanges with refugees, it is only 50% of what's needed. The other 50% is intercultural competence – ie, *becoming skilful in mediating or 'brokering' the cultural differences that underlie our varying communicative styles*.

Putting it another way, cultural awareness alone, however well supported by 'good intentions' and attitudes of 'tolerance', 'empathy' or 'open-mindedness', is not enough. We need practical 'tools for the job' – the communication *skills* to be able to *do/say things differently* as necessary to identify and repair intercultural misunderstandings and so achieve a better outcome. The next section offers a practical toolkit of skills to use in mediating cultural differences in verbal interactions with refugees and people seeking asylum.

Of course, communication is a two-way street. Each party to a verbal exchange needs to be willing to collaborate in *negotiating meanings* to find mutually acceptable outcomes. However, as a volunteer, you have the responsibility for *initiating and leading the way* in this process – ie, for role-modelling good practice in mutual adaptation of communication style or alignment of cultural filters. To achieve this, we need to be equipped with the awareness and skills of intercultural communication – ie, to be able to 'act as our own mediator' in any intercultural exchange.

Native-English-speaking volunteers will want to avoid doing or saying anything that a refugee might find culturally offensive; and in dialogue they will naturally seek to 'echo' or 'mirror' a newcomer's body language to help make them feel welcome.

But to *adapt* to someone's different cultural style of talking in English does not require you to *adopt* that person's cultural behaviour or communication style. Cultural competence is less a matter of changing your own behaviour or style of speaking than being able to *identify* when an intercultural misunderstanding is occurring - with consequent risk of misperception of meanings and intentions - and then drawing on the toolkit of 20 tips to *clarify and repair* these that are set out below.

Reaction   Reflection   Selection   Action

we feel aggravation or uncertainty

we think about it, using the 12 points of cultural difference

we choose a suitable strategy

we act to apply practised skills from the toolkit below

a successful outcome

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20 Tips for success in communicating interculturally with a refugee or person seeking asylum

1. Speak a little slower than normal (but not more loudly!).

2. Enunciate and articulate your consonants as clearly as you can in speaking English (ie, don't mutter or 'swallow your words'). This is very much appreciated by people who are learning English; they positively *like* people when they can clearly understand what they are saying.

3. If your point has not been understood the first time, repetition is unlikely to help: rephrase what you are saying in simpler language.

4. Use short sentences, and pause slightly in between 'ideas' (ie. where the comma would be if you were writing it).

5. Avoid idiomatic expressions at first – or be ready to explain them. The problem is that a beginner in English is likely at first to hear our words *literally,* and so not understand what meaning we intend our words to convey. As native-English speakers we use *figurative* terms more often than we realise. Some (eg, 'red herring' 'hot potato', 'dog's dinner' 'in the doghouse' (= reprimanded) 'push the boat out', 'get cold feet' 'be over the moon' (= very happy) are more obvious and easily avoided than others (eg, 'will you keep an eye on…?', 'could you lend a hand?') or even 'see you later' (a conventional phrase meaning goodbye, with no actual plan for seeing each other later). Bear in mind that we often speak idiomatically when we are feeling uncomfortable about expressing strong feelings about things, or as a precursor to losing our temper. [More explanation of idiomatic usages: see Handout on pp. 69 – 72 below.]

6. Spell out a question explicitly in words rather than relying on intonation.

7. Make points one at a time. In giving instructions, make sure you give them in a clear sequence without interruption.

8. Avoid puns, sarcasm and humour – at least at first. These are often misunderstood across cultures. [The most common complaint by people newly arriving from abroad: 'You can't tell if the British are joking or not'.]

9. Keep grammar simple and clear, eg 'I will' instead of 'I'll'; 'Shall we take a break?' rather than 'You don't mind if we take a break now, do you?'

10. Be mindful of using words with two meanings, eg 'funny' can be 'strange' or 'amusing', so make clear which one you mean.

11. Avoid negative formulations and questions, eg. 'Don't you want to go out?' 'Have you nothing to report?' These often confuse refugees still learning English.

12. Avoid double negatives, eg 'that's not bad'; 'it's not half funny' (= very); 'it's hardly unexpected'.

13. Make requests more directly (cf point 2 of the 12 sources of intercultural miscommunication). Eg, say 'Please close the window', rather than indirectly hinting with a glance at the window: 'Don't you find it a bit cold in here?'

14. Use gestures more than you would normally, and use pictures/diagrams when you can.

15. Summarise any important point you make; check if they have understood by asking them to repeat back what you've said. Don't say 'do you understand?' – they may be tempted to say 'yes' even if the correct answer is 'no'! (They may wrongly believe they do understand, or not wish to imply criticism that you have not made your point clearly, or simply not want to hold up progress.)

16. Expect, and allow for, differences in intonation patterns, eg putting stress on an unexpected syllable in a word or on the 'wrong' word in a sentence. English uses stress to convey meaning more than many other languages and so it is one of the hardest things for a non-native speaker to get right. When they stress the wrong word or syllable it can come across as rude even though that is not what is intended. (See point 6 of the 12 cultural contrasts above; work with refugees through the intonation exercises on pp 28 - 29 in Guide 2 below and Handout p 72.)

17. Be patient, allowing a refugee to contextualise their point in their own communicative style (even if this means listening until the end of what they say to realise their point). In Asian cultures, to interrupt is a form of rudeness. (Remember that there are cultural differences in the structuring of information and answers – point 10 of the 12 cultural contrasts as sources of intercultural miscommunication.)

18. Don't be afraid of silences - but equally don't be offended if you are interrupted (as is customary in Greek or Israeli speaking style). Remember that there are cultural differences about what is polite in terms of turn-taking in conversation. (Point 4 of the 12 cultural contrasts as sources of intercultural miscommunication.)

19. Don't equate grammatical mistakes in English with lack of intelligence.

20. Finally, always bear in mind your own 'cultural lens/filter'. Conventional English, like all other languages, is not 'culture-neutral': it has its own taken-for-granted features under each of the 12 points of cultural contrast (pp 8 – 10 above). For example, if you are a typical native-English speaker, your speaking style is most likely to be relatively low-key, balanced and moderate, factual and impersonal, rational and pragmatic. And while you may be friendly by disposition, you are also conscious that time is money. But people from other cultures may have a speaking style that is more personally animated and emotionally expressive (such that in their terms, English people may come across as tedious or boring – or worse, uncaring or arrogantly detached). And in their culture the pace of action and communication may be slower and less 'frantic': indeed, in rural areas in Asia the *amount* of time people give for a meeting or interview may well <u>be</u> the way to demonstrate respect. As a result, by showing impatience, or in putting pressure on them to 'speed it up' or 'keep it short', a volunteer is liable to come across to them as dismissive or arrogant.

Case-study exercise in applying the tips in action: Home Security

Imagine a situation where a volunteer explains to a newcomer from abroad the importance of locking all doors and windows before they go out. But the newcomer doesn't comply. It's unlikely that they are intentionally breaking the house rules, so what might explain this?
It could be one or both of the following:

1. The refugee or person seeking asylum may come from a rural area where locks are not used - so they forget or don't understand the importance of locking up.

2. The volunteer is mistaken in thinking the refugee or person seeking asylum has understood the 'house-rule': ie, there's been a breakdown in intercultural communication.

Intercultural 'do's and don'ts' relevant for this situation

- **Don't ask 'Do you understand?'** A refugee might well say 'Yes', even when they haven't fully understood. Why? Because either they really believe (though wrongly) that they *have* understood, OR, though uncertain, they want to please you with a positive response (ie, not disappoint or irritate you or hold you up if you are in a hurry, by saying No). They might want to save your face for not having made yourself clear. The advice is: *Always seek feedback on all important points* (ie, ask them to repeat back what they think you meant by what you said).

- **Don't rely on intonation to emphasise a point** – in intercultural exchanges, the whole meaning needs to be given in the words used rather than by putting stress on a particular word (ie, Don't say 'THAT's the most important window to lock'; instead, say 'The most important window to lock is the big one because…')

- **Don't repeat an instruction with the same words** – it's much better to *reformulate* your point in other words. (This gives them a better chance to pick up your meaning.)

- **Avoid the passive.** When explaining security arrangements avoid *passive formulations* such as 'The door must never be left unlocked'. Their mother-tongue might not have such passive usages. (And if taking English words only literally, they might think 'left' = not on the right or = abandoned, and wrongly think they've got the intended message.) Equally, 'You must not forget to lock up' can confuse. (How can one avoid forgetting? And doesn't 'lock up' mean 'put in jail'?)

- **Demonstrate and encourage the guest to practise inferring meanings for themselves**. It's always best not to rely on verbal explanation and instruction but to *show* the refugee the relevant lock, *demonstrate* how it works, and *get them to practise several times* locking and unlocking under your guidance. Also ask the refugee how 'lock the door (or window) on going out' is said in their language.

- **Use visual aids**. At least at first, stick a notice on the door and/or window in block letters saying '*ALWAYS lock the door when you come in and when you go out'*. Add a drawing of a hand holding a key in the lock. Even better: invite the 'guest' to make and affix such a sign/notice, with the self-instruction written in their own language.

Cultural differences and the dangers of stereotypical thinking: optional discussion points

In discussions of cultural differences, the concept 'stereotype' is often elided with the term 'generalisation'. To avoid confusion, it can be important for volunteers to establish a common platform of understanding of the meaning of these terms. Some observations:

What is meant by the term 'stereotype' is not necessarily in itself 'good' or 'bad'. After all, not all stereotypes are negative: many represent positive images/connotations. What is damaging is when a *group* stereotype - or stereotypical thinking - is *applied to an individual,* especially when this is done in an unwarranted or invalid way.

We all act the way we see things; and we treat people according to the way we perceive them. But human beings are complex: we each embody all sorts of different cultural characteristics, overlapping in multi-layered identities. None of us wants to be seen and defined - and so assessed and treated - through a single lens/prism; and all the less so if that lens is a simplistic or derogatory stereotype made all the worse if applied in terms of negative characteristics only, unbalanced by positive attributes.

We also all classify the world in terms of group generalisations - we could hardly make sense of it, or function in it, without using such 'cognitive short-cuts'. For example, 'dogs bark'; 'birds sing/fly'; 'French people speak with animation and gestures' (at least, more so than 'the English'); 'Chinese people' and 'Arabic-speakers' typically communicate in a 'high context' 'indirect' style (at least as compared to most Westerners); and 'people who don't have English as a first language tend to struggle if we talk too fast'. Those are all generalisations. And of course, based on that last one, we learn to speak English more slowly with non-native speakers ***unless and***

until we find it is not necessary. This 'unless and until' principle applies to all the other references to cultural differences made about languages and cultures in these guides.

Glance at these comments from The Judicial College Equal Treatment Bench Book (the official guide for all British magistrates and judges):

"*Stereotypes are simplistic mental shortcuts which are often grossly inaccurate and generate misleading perceptions; it is important not to assume that, because people meet particular criteria (e.g. they are of East or South Asian origin, or of North or West African or Latin American origin), they will behave in a particular way or have particular limitations; and not to attach labels to people and then use the label to undermine their rights in law (e.g. assume they are incapable of giving evidence in court or that they will lie or be disrespectful).*"

"*It is important to avoid perceiving or thinking in stereotypes based on perceived characteristics associated with a particular ethnic group. Even where it is generally true that most members of an ethnic group share certain characteristics, experiences or views, does not mean that every member of the group has those characteristics, experiences or views.*"

As volunteers know, valuing people *equally* does not mean treating everyone *the same* (ie, in narrow-minded, assimilationist, mono-cultural terms), rather, it means *recognising and respecting what makes people different* (ie, in open-minded, intercultural terms).

Stereotypes have been described as "essentializing, caricaturing labels for a group" or "inflexible mental images or representations which require to be protected by rejecting counter-evidence that doesn't support them". They become dangerous when applied *rigidly* either to all in a group, or to an individual case. They are the more dangerous if assumed to be stable, or if clung to uncritically as guidelines to the interpretation of observed or observable behaviour. This can happen when a native-English speaker feels 'gut reactions' of misgiving or unease on encountering culturally unfamiliar behaviour or an unexpected 'difficult' accent or manner of speaking in English. Such feelings are the more likely if filtered through a perception of foreign-born people or of minority ethnic groups influenced by so-called 'stereotype bias' - ie rigidly associating certain traits with a person's social group, especially dangerous if seen in terms of ethnocentric, patronising or derogatory images of Black and Asian people inherited from the imperial/colonial past.

To assess someone in terms of a stereotype is also dangerous because stereotypes lose sight of the unique individuality of each person, and the fact that there will always be individuals who differ from the mainstream.

They also overlook the many sub-groups (eg, by educational level, age, gender, religion, professional/ workplace status, etc) within each cultural group. On top of that, they obscure how cultures and subcultures are constantly evolving and undergoing dynamic change.

So, when speaking of 'cultural differences', this handbook/guide is referring to norms, or predominant tendencies, favoured among cultural groups. Much sociolinguistic research proves that there *are* behavioural and communicative differences between cultures - but in describing these we have to use generalisations that will not necessarily apply to all members of a group, nor to any particular individual within it. And they apply to varying degrees to those individuals who *do* exemplify them. The observations about 'cultural differences' mentioned in this booklet

are best thought of as 'working generalisations' which are *flexible* and *always open to modification from greater experience* – and not as 'essentializing' stereotypes which are rigid, fixed categories that harmfully pigeonhole people.

To underline the point, the main function of generalisations is to make it easier for the brain to make sense of data quickly (ie keeping track of different categories of knowledge about groups of people) - but in the process by which we recognize an individual person's cultural behaviour and/or communicative style as unfamiliar, a descriptive generalisation should be thought of as providing only an *initial* classificatory mental template – ie, only a starting point for seeking better to understand any specific example.

Thus in essence, 'working generalisations' are only a *first best guess or initial clue* about something we see or hear as based on another culture; they must *remain always open to modification, or potential contradiction, by actual experience* - otherwise they can easily slip into oversimplified and rigid stereotypical thinking.

2: Communicating with ARABIC speakers

A guide for volunteers by John Twitchin, assisted by Linda de Wit

PART A: offers a general briefing on cultural differences between British people as native speakers of English and refugees as native speakers of Arabic.

PART B: offers a 'mini-directory' of grammatical differences between Arabic and English.

It may be a statement of the obvious, but communicating with refugees and people seeking asylum is inevitably more difficult if we have little knowledge of the culture they come from, and the difficulties they face in learning English. The first guide above, '*Communicating Interculturally' (pp 4 – 17),* shows how and why *intercultural* misunderstandings occur not only with newly arriving people who are seeking asylum, but also with longer-established refugees who may have gained considerable fluency in English. It includes a toolkit for volunteers on using English with people whose cultural roots are based in any part of the world. However, the main groups of people seeking asylum in the UK have come from North Africa (Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Yemen) and from Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and (in 2022) Ukraine. The two largest single groups come from **Syria** and **Sudan** – two countries which are different in culture, but *which both use forms of Arabic*. **PART A** of this guide therefore outlines some general characteristics of Arabic-speaking cultures*,* while **PART B** reviews why Arabic speakers from Syria and Sudan speak English in the ways they do. And to assist in unravelling linguistic misunderstandings, PART B lists some of the *grammatical differences* that make it difficult for Arabic-speakers to learn and use English.

If you are a trainer/facilitator of volunteers you'll find it useful to show the training video 'The History of Arabic' (to obtain a copy, see p 39). And if you work with refugees from Afghanistan, see the guide below on communicating with speakers of Farsi (pp 33 – 38).

PART A: cultural differences

The Arabic language

Arabic is a Semitic language with a grammar similar to Aramaic, Hebrew and Amharic (the lingua franca in Ethiopia). It is spoken in many varying dialects in Syria, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, UAE, Yemen Republic. It is also used as a second language in countries like Chad, Israel, Bangladesh, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Chechnya.

As it is the language of the Qur'an, the holy word of Islam, Muslims of whatever nationality are to some degree familiar with Arabic, and can to varying extents recite in it. It's worth pointing out that Arabic is a Semitic language, quite different from Farsi, the Indo-European language that is used in Iran and Afghanistan, and in some parts of Pakistan. However, there is one significant point of overlap in that the modern alphabet of Farsi has 32 characters in Arabic script (which is written from right to left). This written form was adopted after the Arab conquest in the seventh century; a lot of Arabic vocabulary was introduced then, making Farsi an unusual blend of two quite different origins and influences. Both Arabic and Farsi speakers find written English difficult if their schooling did not include an introduction to the Latin script.

In general terms, there are four main linguistic areas of the Arabic-speaking world: the Levant, the Maghreb, the Gulf, and Egypt. The dialects spoken differ strongly in pronunciation and vocabulary between these regions (and even between and within countries – in fact, some dialects differ so much that speakers sometimes can't understand each other.) However, a 'pan-Arabic' form exists that is the same across the Middle East and Northern Africa and is taught in schools. This is the standardized Arabic known as *Fusha* which is used for writing, in the media and for official communications. (So most Arabic speakers use two varieties of the same language depending on whether the context is colloquial or formal. (Linguists call this phenomenon 'diglossia'.)

Respecting someone's language is crucial to respecting their cultural identity

Arabic speakers are intensely proud of their rich - indeed sacred - language. Most are Muslims, who believe that God chose Arabic as the medium for delivering His message, the Qur'an, to humankind. However, Arabic-speaking refugees know that it's a difficult language for British native-English speakers to learn. They don't expect a UK volunteer to understand it - or even to pronounce their name accurately at first. But they will be so pleased if on meeting, you make an effort at least to get their Arabic name right (and duly remember to apologise each time it comes out wrongly). Unlike many English names, almost all Arabic names have a clear meaning – for example, 'generous', 'smile' or 'servant of God'. Arabic-speakers greatly welcome being asked what their name means, as well as how it is spoken and spelt (eg including which of the many different spellings of the name 'Mohammed' they find most appropriate). And of course, knowing the meaning is a good way to help remember someone's name.

Taking the trouble to pronounce a person's 'foreign-sounding' name correctly (and taking interest in its meaning) is vital for demonstrating respect for a person as they *are,* in their own cultural terms, and not as we might prefer them to be for our convenience in our own 'monocultural' terms. You will always win warm appreciation from Arabic-speakers if, in addition to asking how to pronounce their Arabic name accurately, you learn a few phrases

in their home dialect (for example, asking the Arabic words for vegetables and other foods). Such actions symbolically demonstrate respect for a language even when we can't speak it.

Characteristic Arab concepts and cultural values

- High priority on honour, respect, community reputation, avoidance of shame.

- Strong identity with, and accountability to, the extended family.

- Saving and giving of face (especially before other Arabs).

- Tendency to be reluctant to admit mistakes or make apologies.

- Building personal relationship before engaging in work and practical tasks.

- A powerful concept of 'fate' – 'Islam' means willing submission to the will of God.

    'Inshallah' is said when someone intends to do something, or wants something to happen (meaning 'I'll do my best but I can't tempt fate or be arrogant enough to think that all is under my control'.) Getting a definitive 'Yes' or 'No' reply can be difficult at times, given their strong underlying belief that we are not in control of our own destinies. (Though it has to be admitted that it's sometimes casually misused or abused - for example when people who have no intention to do something, say 'inshallah' instead).

- Eloquence/rhetoric is much admired in the Arab world – ie, the form of talk as much as its content. *How you say* something is as important as *What you say*.

- Ill at ease in referring to the realities of illness, disaster or death: these are avoided or spoken of euphemistically.

- Very strong religious-based traditions of sharing hospitality: if they can, Arabs will invite you to a meal or family occasion. In the M-East such invitations are aimed at creating personal relationships as a prerequisite for working together.

A key to building trust and rapport with an Arabic-speaking refugee is to regard him/her as *your own inhouse expert* on Arabic language and culture. You doubtless know the conventional Muslim greeting *Assalaam Alaykum* ('Peace be on you'), to which the reply is *Wa Alaikum As-salaam* ('Peace be on you also'). As a joint exercise, why not work through this guide with an Arabic-speaking refugee - to check its accuracy? You could start by reviewing words in English that have been borrowed from Arabic – eg *algebra, alchemy, alcove, alcohol, alkali, cipher, algorithm, almanac* ('al' is the Arabic word for 'the'), *coffee, sesame, apricot, ginger, saffron…* (Some English words sound like vulgar words in Arabic, so are best avoided: *zip; zipper; air; tease; kiss; cuss, nick, unique*.)

Proverbs

You could also invite them to share some Arabic proverbs – after all, proverbs are 'crystallized wisdom' of any cultural community. There are hundreds of Arab proverbs referring to family and relatives, patience and defeatism, fate and luck. Most refugees are happy to share this inherited folk wisdom and compare them to analogous English sayings.

Sample Arabic proverbs

Support your brother, whether he is the tyrant or the tyrannised
The knife of the family does not cut (= If harmed by a relative, don't take offence)
One hand alone does not clap (= It takes two to tango = Cooperation is essential)
The hand of God is with the group (= There is strength in unity)
The young goose is a good swimmer (= Like father, like son)
Older than you by a day, wiser than you by a year (= Respect 'seniors' and their advice)
Every sun has to set (= Status and/or fortune may be fleeting)
The dogs may bark but the caravan moves on (= You should rise above petty criticism)
The monkey in the eyes of his mother is a gazelle (= There's nothing like motherly love)
…………………………………..

Proverbs embody information about a culture. The first two in the list above reflect the prime importance of loyalty to one's group. Another proverb, "Me against my brother, my brother and I against my cousin, and all of us against the world", is a saying that originated in tribal Bedouin culture, describing how circles of loyalty work. Proverbs two and three above reflect the *collectivist outlook* of Arabic culture. A further saying emphasizes the importance of people over things: "Choose your neighbour before your house, and your companion before the road."

Islamic religious practice: individual or group prayer five times a day

1. Before sunrise (*Fajr*); 2. Between sun reaching height and mid-afternoon (*Dhuhr*); 3. Between mid-afternoon and sunset (*Asr*); 4. After sun has set (*Maghrib*); 5. In darkness of the night (*Isha*). As a preliminary to prayer when they can, most Muslims perform the *wudu* – ritual washing that symbolises spiritual cleansing. Prayer can be carried out anywhere, not only in a mosque. It is performed in the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca (the most sacred site in Islam, the cube-shaped building thought to have been built by the prophet Ibrahim and his son Ismail, containing a stone believed to date back to the time of Adam and Eve).

A key first step for supporting newly arrived Arabic-speaking people seeking asylum is to assign space for a prayer mat facing Mecca (ie, south-eastwards from the UK). Making regular recitations and prayers is not felt as an imposition by Arabs: they take regular prayers for granted as the way to structure daily living. (Taking time out for regular prayers gives Muslims a chance five times a day in effect to 'slow down' and meditate - a practice that could doubtless benefit many overworked British non-Muslims….)

Islamic festivals/events

Friday is the holy day, with communal prayers at mosques at midday – this is a crucial opportunity for social and community contact and support. *Ramadan* is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, during which Muslims refrain from eating from dusk till dawn. (Muslims don't have to fast if they are ill, old, travelling, pregnant, breastfeeding, or on their period.) *Eid al-Fitr* is when families assemble for at least one but up to three days of celebratory meals at the end of Ramadan, wishing each other 'Eid Mubarak' (Happy Eid), giving gifts to children and showing hospitality. *Eid al-Adha* is a festival of sacrifice celebrated by Muslims who do not make

pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*). *Muslims love being asked by volunteers to explain the significance of their religious festivals.* (As we see in the video documentary 'Attitudes to Islam' – cf page 53.)

We all enjoy sharing what we know with others, and this is especially true in the Middle East, where people generally love talking, sharing, and what one sociologist described as 'having the upper hand' in any interaction: for example, Arabic-speakers prefer to give gifts rather than receive them, and to give answers rather than asking questions. But some sensitive topics can harm relationships if not dealt with very carefully:

- **Religion**. In the Middle East, religion is very important as part of a person's identity (many countries indicate religion in people's ID cards). As already noted, Arabic-speakers are more than happy to tell you about the significance and rituals of their religion. (If you are atheistic or agnostic, expect that sharing that information may well cause confusion or disbelief.)
- **Politics**. Generally, avoid criticising the political leadership of Arabic-speaking countries – unless the refugee or person seeking asylum initiates it. It's well known that the Israel-Palestine conflict is a particularly emotionally charged topic across the Arabic world. Bear in mind that, while international political discussion might interest you, for many Arabic-speakers it's not a matter of 'interesting' debate: it's a matter of life and death.
- **Sexuality**. Most areas in the Middle East are sexually conservative. Homosexuality and gender fluidity are hardly ever publicly acknowledged/accepted – indeed, most people there still regard these as 'illnesses' requiring treatment or strengthening of one's faith.
- **Mental health**. There is much stigma in the Arabic-speaking world concerning psychological or mental health issues: this inhibits many refugees from discussing these or seeking professional help. As volunteers know, many refugees have experienced not just the traumas of leaving their homeland and getting to the UK, but the traumas of being wrenched from their family and being left by the Home Office (often for years) uncertain whether they will gain the basic stability/security of 'leave to remain'.

Some practical points in communicating interculturally with Arabic speakers:

- **Refusing offers**. As remarked earlier, for Arabic-speakers verbal communication aims not only to inform, but more importantly, to *build relationship*. Connection is established by conveying the emotional dimension of 'life experiences' in conversations – such that compared with English, Arabic speech often seems hyperbolic – using exaggeration. One way this is demonstrated is that invitations are sometimes not to be taken literally - the invitation has a goal of strengthening a relationship. So, if an Arabic-speaker offers something to you, it's wise to thank them for their generosity, but politely refuse a few times. If they keep offering it, then accept it so as not to offend them. (cf Naji, p 5).
- **Compliments**. When you compliment an Arabic speaker on an object they own, they may offer it to you, to show that your relationship is more valuable to them than that item. Again, it is expected and polite to refuse first. Further, you should know about the concept of the evil eye: someone's envy can put a curse on the receiver. A good way to compliment the item is to say 'mashallah', which conveys the meaning that you hope that God will protect it.
- **Face, honour, pride**. Never criticize an Arabic speaker in front of others, because this makes them lose face. Always talk privately and individually when you need to express

criticism. While gently teasing is a way in Britain to express affection and friendship, for Arabic speakers it can hurt their honour and pride. Poking fun at family members may well feel extremely offensive to them.

- **Saying no**. Arabs generally don't like to say no (they might tell you 'inshallah' instead); they often keep it to themselves if they don't understand what you just said; and they sometimes make up an answer even when they don't know the answer. This is because, again, the *relationship* is prioritized over mere information: they might not want to disappoint you or they might not want to lose face in front of you. Thus, when you need to be sure someone understands you, ask them to confirm in feedback what you've said.

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Following a training course run by SIETAR UK Refugees Project in 2021, an English volunteer noted these personal observations on his four years of teaching refugees and people seeking asylum who came from Iraq, Syria, Greater Kurdistan, Iran:

- I find I need to remind myself not to try to shake hands with women.
- I find most refugees are highly motivated to engage in learning and/or training.
- However, some have lost self-confidence - traumatised by what they have witnessed.
- I was aware of open grief in a tragic event - a student from Aleppo received a phone call in class time to tell him that both his brothers had been killed in an air raid. His crying and screams will be remembered by myself for the rest of my life.
- Though hardly surprisingly, I have found that refugees who come from an urban background (rather than rural) are more adept at learning English.
- Hospitality. Muslims are very keen to offer you a meal in their own homes when one is undertaking one-to-one tuition. One does not wish to upset them, so I take up the offer even though a coffee or tea would have been quite adequate. However, it's on just such occasions that they become less reticent, and readier to open up to convey what they have been through.
- I have found that some are reluctant to take notes in class – this is not out of laziness: it's because writing the Latin script of English alphabetical letters is very difficult for adult learners, certainly at an elementary level.
- Understanding usage of modal verbs ('could'/'might') is also very difficult for them.
- Equally difficult is when to use capital letters in written English.
- In Syria many men developed some knowledge of English from watching Premier League football on television: though this stopped with the onset of civil war in 2011.

Culturally different communicative styles

This guide began with the comment that in supporting Arabic-speaking refugees and people seeking asylum who are keen to pick up English, it helps to know the cultural and linguistic difficulties they face in learning it. Most volunteers know that learning English is not just a matter of vocabulary, ie, knowing what individual words mean as labels for objects or facts. It's also crucially a matter of understanding the cultural conventions of *how words are used* to express feelings and convey our meanings and intentions. As an example, let's review the ways that conversational English typically differs from conversational Arabic.

In general terms, *British communicative style* typically takes for granted an 'I' identity centred on individual personhood. It is spoken not loudly but in a low-key, moderate manner which typically understates feelings/emotions. It is 'overlap adversant' – in other words, in conversational exchanges it generally prefers short, separate turns, and not interrupting people unless with an apology. It is shy of silences (unlike Arabic-speaking culture, which is usually comfortable with sitting quietly together). It embodies an ideology of egalitarianism, ie, talking to people as equals. In tackling problems, it takes a pragmatic approach; in formal situations it tends to adopt an 'instrumental', linear way of thinking, favouring objective discussion and argument.

By contrast, *Arabic communicative style* traditionally values harmony in interrelations, and the giving of 'positive face' (boosting a person's status) through a dramatizing and 'flowery' way of talking that promotes the taking of long turns. Arab culture is more hierarchical than Western culture, and the language reflects that with a wide array of words and phrases for showing politeness while an informal relationship is being established. In Arabic conversation, form is as important as content: it often includes sweeping assertions, over-generalisations and expressive embellishment through metaphors, similes, and rhythmic repetitions. These are used in *building relationship* and in *persuading others*: for Arabic speakers, this is the most vital function/ purpose of communication. As already noted, Arabic style admires rhetoric. From a British perspective this seems to involve over-assertion, repetition (especially of key points), together with embellishment, exaggeration, long justifications and explanations.

Also, the *pitch* of talk in Arabic is generally *louder* than in typical English talk. The loudness is mainly for dramatic effect: it could be wrong to take it as indicating how definite the speaker feels about what they are saying. And while a raised voice in the UK might suggest that an argument has begun, for Arabic speakers it's the inherited traditional verbal style for demonstrating sincerity, engagement, enthusiasm.

Indirectness

A major cultural difference is that, as a reflection of the central concepts of honour, pride and saving face in Arabic culture, Arabic speakers are comparatively *indirect* in their style of communication. This way of talking allows them *to avoid personal confrontation or disagreement or awkward situations*. In other words, the typical Arabic-speaker's manner is not to speak directly and candidly (ie, bluntly 'saying what I mean') but rather, to speak *indirectly* – thus safeguarding the honour of the other person and maintaining harmony with them. To help in this, Arabic speakers often deploy little stories or parables.

Linguists refer to this way of speaking as 'high context'– ie, conveying meaning as much by *shared understanding of the environment/situation as much as by the words used.* This differs from the typically more direct and precise 'low context' style of 'standard English'. (It's also more expressive and dramatic than the more 'passive' high context style that typifies the way of communicating in China and Japan: Arabic speakers typically include more *emotive* human elements in their arguments, responding more readily to personalised arguments than to logical ones.) Incidentally, there's a long tradition in Arab culture of making *personal appeal to authorities to make exceptions to rules* - particularly if the request

can be justified on the grounds of unusual personal need. Having a network is very important in the Arab world; they refer to this as 'wasta.' For them, such appeals are not an unlawful or unethical attempt to gain advantage – rather, they reflect the basic Arabic cultural value that people are more important than rules.

However, an exception to the indirect approach is often made when Arabic speakers of the younger generation express personal interest in someone, or seek to 'place' them socially. On meeting (if they have basic English) they may well ask direct questions such as 'What do you do?' 'Where did you study?' 'Are you married?' 'Have you got children?' 'How much do you earn?' 'Have you bathed?' (This last query, by the way, usually turns out to be a grammatically simplified version of the traditional Muslim polite greeting: 'Have you washed hands/feet for prayer time?'). For Arabic-speakers, such questions are not a rude invasion of privacy: it's their way of demonstrating interest and engagement in building a friendly personal relationship. British volunteers are recommended not to rebuff any such questions as too 'personal' or 'intrusive'. It's better to respond in kind - though of course editing your answers sensitively: for example, if your professional earnings, in a very different British economy, are much greater than theirs, then fully expressing this fact could be intimidating. In addition, you can make this a learning moment by pointing out that, given the British cultural priority on privacy, some English people will not like being asked such a question: awareness of this will help an Arabic speaking refugee in building relationships in the future.

Arabic-speaking refugees to varying degrees adopt into their way of speaking English the comparatively *indirect* communicative style of their mother-tongue – ie, incorporating an inductive rather than deductive approach and expressing their meaning through strong, sweeping assertions with repetition and arguments couched in dramatic, affective language. Until a native-English volunteer gets used to it, this Arabic cultural style can seem 'overemotional' and excessively weighted in hyperbole and exaggeration. However, rather than rebuff or criticise it, 'go with the flow'. 'Echo' it by temporarily setting aside any British 'reserve' or understatement you bring to the exchange. (Some volunteers, accustomed to 'stiff upper lip' restraint of expression of feeling and emotion, can find this positively liberating!) However, there's no denying that the 'flowery' manner of Arabic-speaking refugees can become irritatingly time-consuming and frustrating for 'hosting' volunteers when some things are not made 100% clear because they are being said 'indirectly' - or indeed, are not being said at all. But for Arabic speakers, the more direct norms and 'instrumentally precise' communicative style of 'standard' spoken English are no less problematic. For them, the 'low-key', non-expressive and 'moderate' English cultural style of speaking can seem 'distancing' in effect (even appearing as somewhat aggressive or rude): it can seem to imply that the English person doesn't care about them and has little or no interest in building genuine personal relationship.

To confirm this point of cultural difference: the Arabic-speaking style of persuasiveness and of presenting an argument is typically different from Western/English style. While most British people place a premium on presenting facts or argument in a logical linear, relatively 'low-key' way, Arabic culture places a higher value on the display of emotion. Arabic speakers have a strong belief in the persuasive power of dramatic and emotional messages, and they often carry this over into their way of using English. For them, demonstrating an emotional dimension through a rhetorical style of speech indicates deep and sincere concern - whatever the topic under discussion. And raising one's voice and repeating points

(even on occasion pounding the table for emphasis!) for them indicates sincerity rather than anger. (In fact, if someone says something softly and only once, many Arabic speakers will interpret this as casting doubt on whether the person sincerely means what they are saying.)

Arabic-speaking refugees of course vary in the extent to which they carry over the way of speaking their mother-tongue into their way of speaking/using English. Refugee children often 'acculturate' quickly to British manners and ways of speaking as a result of talking in English (and/or Welsh) with peer groups in school, and through their exposure to British TV. After all, they are on course to gaining the benefits of becoming bi-lingual and bi-cultural. But for many of their parents' generation, English is initially very difficult to learn. On top of that, in British formal or official and legal settings, the indirectness of Arabic communicative style, together with their hyperbolic manner of persuasion, can unfortunately create an impression that they are being evasive or unreliable. This may be wholly misleading and wrong: it's easy to 'misread' what an Arabic-speaking refugee is trying to say because we are disconcerted or irritated by the 'odd-sounding' way they speak in English. Such feelings of irritation can make us overlook a need to demonstrate empathy, or patiently to build rapport, as a gut reaction to the 'oddity' of their Arabic accent, and/or their 'staccato' manner of speaking English.

Such 'oddity' might well be a result of the grammatical differences between English and Arabic. To help you check this possibility in any given case, PART B below sets out a 'mini-directory' of Arabic/English grammatical differences.

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PART B: Grammatical differences between Arabic and English – reference source to clarify misunderstandings

The written form of Arabic

As a Semitic language, the basis of Arabic is (like Hebrew) the three-consonant root. A notion like *writing, cooking,* or *eating* is represented by three consonants in a particular order. All verb forms, nouns, adjectives, participles, etc. are then formed by putting the three root consonants into fixed patterns, modified on occasion by simple prefixes and suffixes. There are over 50 such patterns forming the structural basis of the language.

As volunteers in the UK know, *Arabic is written from right to left*. Only consonants and long vowels are written down, and there is no upper- or lower- case distinction (ie, no capital letters). Every Arabic letter can be written in four ways depending on its position in a word: beginning, middle, end, or in isolation - isolated forms of letters cannot simply be juxtaposed to form words. As a result, Arabic speakers have to learn an entirely new alphabet for English - including the capital letter system - and have to master the unconventional spellings of English, even before they start learning to recognise the vast range of metaphorical usages, idioms and other figurative expressions that are used in English. (For a Handout on Idioms, see p 69 ff.)

This all means that Arabic-speaking adults can't be expected to cope with reading or writing English at all quickly. Typical initial difficulties are:

- Misreading letters with 'mirror' shapes, eg, p and q or d and b.
- Misreading letters by right-to-left eye movement ('form' for from; 'twon' for town).
- Malforming individual letters o,a,t,d,g, and omitting capital letters.
- Printing out letters of English rather than replicating a 'cursive' (handwritten) script.
- The numerals used in Arabic-speaking countries, though also written from left to right, are different from the 'Arabic' derived numerals used in Europe.

Native-speakers of Arabic have great difficulty with the confusing variations of patterns of words in English – nouns, verbs and adjectives follow no consistently regular patterns to distinguish one from another. Where English does have regularity – especially in the area of 'affixes' like *-ing, -able, un-*, Arabic speakers can grasp these more readily.

Pronunciation: use of vowels and consonants

The most obvious difference between Arabic and English lies in their alphabetical writing systems. But there are also contrasts between Arabic and English in the sounds they use, and in the emphasis placed on vowels and consonants in expressing meaning. *While English has 22 vowels and diphthongs to 24 consonants, Arabic has only 8 vowels and diphthongs to 32 consonants*. As a result, when speaking in English, Arabic speakers tend to gloss over and/or confuse English short vowel sounds, while unduly emphasising consonants. Because the Arabic spelling, within its own system, is phonetic (ie, the alphabet represents each sound of speech clearly and consistently) Arabic speakers naturally try at first to pronounce English words phonetically. Then, when they add to this the reverence of their mother-tongue for consonants, we are likely to hear pronunciation oddities like *'istobbid'* for stopped; *'forigen'* for foreign. The key features of an 'Arabic accent' are more energetic articulation, more stressing of syllables, and fewer vowel sounds - so giving *a staccato effect*. Arabic speakers' common problems with English vowel sounds are saying *bit* for bet; *cot* for caught; *red* for raid; *hop* for hope. Their common problems with consonants are saying *p* and *b* randomly, eg *I baid tenpence for a bicture of Pig Pen*. This is because the Arabic language does not have a p-sound. Also, *v* and *f* are both pronounced as f – so we get *It is a ferry nice fillage*. This is because the Arabic language does not have a v-sound. *g* and *k* are often confused (eg goat/coat and bag/back) because some dialects of Arabic do not have a g-sound.

Groups of consonants that don't occur in Arabic include *spr, skr, str, spl.* As a result, Arabic speakers tend to insert short vowels to 'assist' the pronunciation of these: '*perice*' or '*pirice*' for price; '*ispring*' or '*sipring*' for spring. There are more than 78 forms of 'final cluster' consonants in words in English, but none at all in Arabic. This is why Arabic-speakers tend to insert short vowels, eg, '*arrangid*' for arranged; '*neckis*t' for next.

Rhythm of speech and placing of stress on a particular word in an English sentence

Differences in spoken language are not just a matter of how words are pronounced. Meaning is also conveyed through *differences of tone of voice; phrasing; pitch; pacing; use of pauses/ silences; loudness*. In particular, while phrase and sentence rhythms are not entirely dissimilar in Arabic and English, verbal *stress* in Arabic is usually placed on the *first syllable*. And syllables

which as native speakers in English we don't stress at all in our talk are usually articulated clearly by Arabic speakers - they don't 'skate over', 'swallow' or 'mutter' their syllables and phrases' in our 'phrase-clustering' English way of speaking. When reading English aloud, Arabic-speakers tend to avoid contracted forms and elisions: this emphasises the *staccato* effect of their speech style. And as Arabic is a phonetic language, the wide variety of patterns of placing stress in spoken English – both within a word and on a word within a sentence - is difficult for them. Volunteers can therefore help Arabic-speaking refugees particularly by pointing out the placing of stresses in English talk: here are some exercises to help Arabic-speakers understand how putting stress on a word in an English sentence can change the meaning.

EXERCISE: how meaning changes in English by which word is stressed

As most volunteers are aware, in inflected languages, the order of words hardly matters - the meaning and relationships of words is made clear by the different endings of verbs and nouns. But English long ago discarded inflected endings in favour of other ways to indicate meaning: for example, by the order and positions of words in sentences, by the varying of pitch (higher and lower), by the 'clustering' of words into 'strong' and 'weak' phrases, and especially by the use of emphasis/stress both on parts of words and on particular words within a sentence. Here's an example of how English carries the contrastive meaning *this* as opposed to *that* by putting stress on a particular word in a sentence:

THIS is my mother's black cat   (= as opposed to that one over there…)
This IS my mother's black cat   (= as opposed to another cat, not my mother's…)
This is MY mother's black cat   (= as opposed to my step-sister's mother's …)
This is my MOTHER'S black cat   (= as opposed to my father's/uncle's/sister's….)
This is my mother's BLACK cat   (= as opposed to her tabby/ginger….)
This is my mother's black CAT   (= as opposed to her dog/tortoise/goldfish…)

That sentence of six words in English carries 6 different meanings: ie, the same words but spoken differently. The sentence comprises only three words when translated to Arabic. So, when smaller parts (like 'my', which is a suffix in Arabic) need to be stressed, Arabic-speakers will often introduce an additional word to carry the due emphasis.
As another example, read out these four possible responses to the accusation: 'You stole the soap'. '*I* didn't steal the soap' (= I didn't steal it; someone else did). 'I *didn't* steal the soap' (= a more emphatic denial). 'I didn't *steal* the soap' (= I *paid* for it). 'I didn't steal the *soap*' (= I didn't steal the soap, though I did steal *something else)*.

Native English speakers have no difficulty understanding what is being said, protested or implied. But Arabic speakers need practice to be able to express meaning in English by intonation alone.

Apart from signalling meaning (or expressing indignation and other implied feelings), we also use intonation to *ask questions*. Imagine for a moment that an Arabic-speaking refugee is facing cross-examination in a tribunal case, in which he/she is seeking to defend a claim of harassment or other detriment for whistle-blowing at their workplace. Until they have become fluent in spoken English, he or she may fail to realise how intonational stressing of a word conveys which facts are being alleged, or being challenged by innuendo or implication as untrue:

Did you tell HR in that meeting that your supervisor was taking money? (did you really do that?)
Did *you* tell HR in that meeting that your supervisor was taking money? (you or someone else?)
Did you *tell HR* in that meeting that your supervisor was taking money? (or did you send an email?)
Did you tell HR in *that* meeting that your supervisor was taking money? (then or at another time?)
Did you tell HR in that meeting that your *supervisor* was taking money? (or accuse someone else?)
Did you tell HR in that meeting that your supervisor was *taking* money? (or doing something else?

Refugees whose mother tongue doesn't use stresses in the same way as native-English may well miss the differing meanings implied through emphasising particular different words in such a question. The result is that they don't catch what is really being asked, or what point has been made. And if their reply doesn't echo the expected intonation pattern of a native-English speaker, their response may well be heard as 'wrong', or worse, misleading. Because Arabic (along with Indian languages, Farsi, Spanish, for example) do not carry meaning by putting stress on a particular word in a sentence, doing this in English as a second or third language is one of the hardest things to learn.

Meaning is also carried by **intonation and stressing *within* words:** A particular difficulty for learners is the way many words in English *change from noun to verb by altering stress from first to second syllable*. As an exercise to try with a refugee, compare these nouns (and adjectives) and verbs:

NOUNS (a/the) transport, subject, record, project, contract, object, protest, upset, progress, attribute, reject, suspect, invalid, converse, increase, contribution, exploit, entrance, address, estimate, compound, impact, pervert, contrast, produce, present, conduct, construct, advocate, incline, conflict, refuse, rebel, console, escort, refund, contest, intimate, import/export, insert, commune, insult, accent, recount, conflict, extract, curate, diktat, mandate, transfer, ferment, segment, fragment, torment, rampage, moderate, ally, entrance, discharge, desert, digest, defile, consort, defect, refuse, compact, excise, affect, essay
and ADJECTIVES: separate, appropriate, perfect, necessary, contrary, alternate, deliberate

VERBS (to) transport, subject, record, project, contract, object. protest. upset, progress. attribute, reject. suspect, invalidate, converse, increase, contribute, exploit, entrance, address, estimate, compound, impact, pervert, contrast, produce, present, conduct, construct, advocate, incline, conflict, refuse, rebel, console, escort, refund, contest, intimate, import/export, insert, commune, insult, accent, recount, conflict, extract, curate, dictate, mandate, transfer, ferment, segment, fragment, torment, rampage, moderate, ally, entrance, discharge, desert, digest, defile. consort, defect, refuse, compact, excise, affect, essay

separate, appropriate, perfect, necessitate, be contrary, alternate, deliberate

Arabic speakers typically *do not put the stress needed on the second syllable to distinguish the verb from the noun.* They often don't realise how this confuses native-English speakers - as when they don't distinguish by stress between words in a sentence, eg between loud voice and loud voice.

'Mini-directory' of grammatical differences

Below is a selection of grammatical differences (which draws on 'Learner English', ed. Swan and Smith, CUP). The examples might seem 'pedantic' or 'technical' - but they provide a reference source for when you want to check why an Arabic-speaking refugee's way of speaking in English seems *unexpectedly, and/or aggravatingly, unclear*. Of course, it might be that they simply haven't understood why you are asking a question, or they may be needing more time to translate your question/ comment into Arabic in their mind before then translating their reply in English. But it can be important to know *why* an Arabic-speaking refugee's way of speaking English 'sounds wrong' to the ear of a native-English speaker. This 'mini-directory' will help you identify and unravel *grammatical differences* that often produce intercultural 'mistakes' and misunderstandings. Clarifying these will help you to check whether a refugee's irritating incoherence or confusion is not a sign that they are being evasive or 'acting stupid' – but is simply an unwitting result of cultural and linguistic differences in transferring meanings between the differing grammars of Arabic and English.

To be
There is no verb *to be* in Arabic in the present tense. The English terms *am, is, are* are

not expressed in Arabic, so learners of English commonly omit them, particularly in using present progressive verb forms: *He teacher. The boy tall. He going to school.*

Questions and negatives

The common English 'auxiliary' word *do* has no equivalent in Arabic. Where no specific question word is used, a question is marked only by rising intonation. *You like coffee?* Negatives are most often formed by putting a particle (*laa* or *maa*) before the verb: so, in speaking English we get *He not play football*.

Pronouns

Arabic verb forms incorporate personal pronouns, subject and object, as prefixes and suffixes. So, in English they are often repeated as part of the verb: *John he works there.*

Time and verb tenses

Past time: Arabic has a past, or perfect tense, signifying an action completed at the time of speaking. In spoken Arabic there's no distinction between what in English would be a simple past (eg, *You went there…*) and a present perfect verb (eg, *Did you hear it?)*
The past perfect tense is formed by the past tense of the verb *to be*, followed by the past tense verb. (So in English we get: *He was ate his dinner when I came* for *He had eaten…*)
There is a past progressive tense, formed by the past tense of the verb *to be* followed by the present tense verb (So, we might hear: *He was eats* meaning *he was eating.*)
In reported speech Arabic tends to use the tense of the original speech, not the past tense conventions of English. The use of direct speech is more common. (So, we might hear: *He told me I am going to London* instead of *He told me he was going….).*

Present time: Arabic has a simple present tense form, signifying an action unfinished at the time of speaking. It covers the English simple and progressive present tenses. The lack of a present tense of the verb *to be* in Arabic causes many 'mistakes' in using the present tense in English. (*He go with me now/every day; He going with me…; He is go with me; What you do?; When you come/coming back?)*
The Arabic present tense also refers to duration of time up to the time of speaking – as would be expressed in English by present perfect. (So, *I learn/I learning English three months now).* This present tense is also frequently used in the role of a subjunctive after *that* for subordinate clauses. (So, we might hear: *He wants that he go with me to the shop/office.*)

Future time: There is no future tense in Arabic. As an approximation to the English *will* and *shall,* either a present tense form is used to refer to the future, or various 'future-indicating' particles are placed before the present tense verb.

Modal verbs

There are no modal verbs (could/would) in Arabic. This makes big problems for Arabic-speakers in grasping and using the forms and functions of modal verbs in English. At first, they tend to simply add regular verb endings with auxiliaries (eg *Does he can do that? Yes, he cans do that* meaning 'he could…')

There's a strong tendency to overuse *that* clauses (*It is possible that I come with you? I can that I help you. He wants that he helps you.*)

Gerunds and infinitives

The gerund does not exist in Arabic in the same form as English. (There is a form called 'masdar' which is normally used when in English the gerund, infinitive or verbal noun

would be used.) The equivalent of 'I enjoy swimming' would be *I enjoy (that) I swim.* For *I prefer working to playing* the Arabic equivalent would be *I prefer that I work to that I play.*

Equally, there is no infinitive form in Arabic – it is normally expressed in Arabic as a simple verb, with or without a *that*.

Active and passive

There are active and passive forms in Arabic, but the passive differs only in the pronunciation of the (unwritten) short vowels. A passive written verb is therefore only recognisable as such by its context. The preposition for agency in Arabic is **bi**, which leads to overuse of *by* in English. (*He was stabbed by a knife; the letter was written by a pen.*)

The active form is often used for passive (*He hit by a stone; the bill paid by the government*) or the passive verb is made active (*The bill, the government paid it*).

Definite and indefinite articles

Arabic speakers have great difficulties with English genitive construction(s). The big problem with the definite article in Arabic (in which it takes the form of a prefix al-) arises from interference from the Arabic genitive construction which simply consists of the subject followed by the genitive - so they are likely to say *Book John* (for The book of John, or John's book); *Work man* (for 'a man's work' or The work of a man); *Car the teacher (*for The teacher's car).

There is no indefinite article in Arabic. So, in speaking English it's often omitted with singular and plural 'countable nouns': '*This book' or 'This is book'* (meaning This is a book).

Once they are told about the English 'a', it is frequently used wherever the definite article is not used: *'These are a books' 'I want a rice'.*

The cases in which English omits the article (*in bed; at dawn; on Thursday; for breakfast….*) usually take the definite article in Arabic (*What you want for the breakfast the Sunday?*). The days of the week, some months in the Muslim calendar, and many names of towns and countries incorporate the definite article in Arabic – and this may or may not be translated appropriately. (*We lived in the Pakistan; We had a flat in the Khartoum.*)

Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives follow their nouns in Arabic – and agree in gender and number. As a result, beginners in English are liable to make mistakes like '*He (is) man tall'* for *He's a tall man.*

Adverbs are used less often in Arabic than English, and have no fixed pattern. Adverbs of manner are often expressed in a phrase when speaking English *('with speed' for quickly; 'in a dangerous way' for dangerously).* There is commonly confusion between adjective and adverb forms in English; the adjective form is often overused *('He drives very dangerous').*

Gender and number

Arabic has two genders, masculine and feminine – indicated by word ending or word meaning. Plurals of nouns not referring to human beings are considered feminine singular *('Where are the books?' 'She is on the table…I gave her to the teacher')*

Plurals of nouns in Arabic are formed by internal pattern changes (as with *mouse - mice* in English). English adds a *-s* suffix, but Arabic speakers often omit this: *'I have many book'.*

For nouns following numbers above ten, Arabic uses the singular form – often transferred into English: *'I have three brothers and twelve uncle.'*

Prepositions and particles

Arabic has a wealth of fixed prepositions used with verbs and adjectives – that don't coincide with their direct English translations. So, you may hear *arrive to; afraid from; angry on; a picture from (*for *of); responsible from; in spite from; near from; look to (*for *at;) an expert by.*

The Arabic equivalent of *on* can express obligation*: It is on me that I pay you.*

The equivalents of *to* and *for* can express possession*: The book is to/for me (= is mine).*

The equivalent of *with* can express possession: *With me my camera (= it's with/on me).*

The equivalent of *for* can express purpose: *I went home for get my book (= to get my)*

Because there are no phrasal verbs in Arabic, refugees often use a simple regular verb to avoid using a phrasal verb altogether, or omit the preposition or particle. *I search my keys; I look my keys; I put my clothes (off); I dress me.*

Confusion of 'it' and 'there'

The expressions *there is/are* are indicated in most Arabic dialects by the preposition 'fee' (which also means 'in'), which is commonly not carried over into English. In formal Arabic the concept is indicated by a passive of the verb *to find*, meaning *to exist*: *'It exists a horse in that field'* OR '*A horse is found in that field'*. As the English verbs *to exist* or *to be found* may not be known to newly arriving refugees, you may hear '*It is a horse in that field' (= There's a horse…)*

Question tags

The most common and unchanging question tag in all Arabic dialects is translated as '*Is that not so?*' Arabic speakers are bewildered by the range of changing forms in English question tags. Probably best to agree on one question tag formulation, and stick to it for asking questions.

Subordinate clauses

Clauses in English introduced by *in order that…* are introduced in Arabic by a conjunction translated as *for*, followed by present tense: *I went to the shop for (I) buy shoes*.

The relative pronoun (*which, who, that*) distinguishes in Arabic according to gender, but not between human and non-human. As a result, Arabic speakers often confuse *who* and *which.*

Arabic has two words for *if* – to indicate the degree of likelihood of the conditional sentence/clause. Where English uses conditional verb forms, Arabic uses the simple past, in both the main and the conditional clauses: '*If he went to Germany, he/she learned German'* (meaning '*If he went to Germany, he/she would learn German'* and '*If he/she had gone to Germany, he/she would have learned German*

3: Communicating with speakers of FARSI

A guide for volunteers by John Twitchin in collaboration with Janina Neumann

Introductory background

This guide is addressed to volunteers who communicate with FARSI-speaking refugees from Afghanistan. It is a companion piece to 'Communicating with ARABIC speakers' (pp 18 – 31 above): ie, Afghans' fellow Muslims from Syria, Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen.

In written form, both language groups use the Arabic alphabet (the language of the Qur'an), but their spoken languages have quite different origins: Farsi is Iranian/Indo-European; Arabic is Semitic. *https://www.lingualinx.com/blog/farsi-vs-arabic-comparision*

Farsi is spoken in a variety of dialects in Iran and Afghanistan. Afghanistan has two official languages, Pashto and Dari. However, less formally, most Dari speakers call their language Farsi or Persian. *https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/afghanistans-persian-linguistic-identity/*

You need to bear in mind that the spoken Persian in Afghanistan and Tajikistan differs significantly from the Iranian version. For example, Afghans tend to still use the 'written' Farsi words in everyday conversations. *https://www.persianstepbystep.com/farsi-spoken-versus-written-persian/*

A significant proportion of refugees who have come from Afghanistan have experience as translators/interpreters of dialects of Farsi and/or Pashto to and from English. They worked for British and American military forces, or for the government of Afghanistan, in the 20-year period before the Taliban take-over of government in summer of 2021. It would therefore be wrong to assume that all recent refugees from Afghanistan will inevitably be beginners in English - many will linguistic expertise which is helpful to you and other volunteers.

You'll hear some speakers of Farsi saying 'Salaam Alaikum' - the greeting used by Arabic speakers. But this does not necessarily mean that the Farsi speaker can speak Arabic or indeed, is actually of Muslim faith.

As an act of respect, you might also find that it's common for Farsi speakers when using English to address individuals in certain professions or roles as "Mr Doctor" or "Mr Boss".

You'll doubtless come across the concept/act of 'tarof kardan'. This is when you refuse something one or two times before accepting it - it's an important custom of politeness in Farsi-speaking culture.

A good way to relate to Farsi-speakers who come from *Iran* is to mention, or to ask about, the famous Iranian poets Rumi and Hafez.

Another good way to relate/connect is to share familiar proverbial sayings, reviewing their cross-cultural differences and similarities of meaning.

The alphabet of Farsi

The alphabet of Farsi has 32 letters, adopted in their written form from Arabic, and similarly written from right to left. This written form of Farsi was adopted after the Arab conquest in the seventh century; a lot of Arabic vocabulary was introduced then, making Farsi an unusual blend of languages with two very different origins and influences. It's estimated that only about 38% of Afghans have attended school and so become literate in both reading and writing: it's also a big difficulty for both Arabic and Farsi speaking refugees if their schooling gave no introduction to the Latin script of English: in adapting to life in the UK they have to learn a completely different alphabet.

Because most of the letters connect with other letters, there are four forms of letter; initial, medial, final and independent. Each form has the same pronunciation, but looks different according to its position – ie, where the letter appears in the word (at beginning, middle, end or on its own). There are seven letters which never connect to any other letter. And there are no capital letters in written Farsi: this makes it difficult for Afghans to master the use of capitals when writing English.

Speech-forms of Farsi

Farsi-speaking refugees newly arriving in the UK face particular difficulties with English alphabetical letters that have mirror-images: ie, *b* and *d*, and *p* and *q*. They can also be confused by combinations of letters in English, when they 'automatically' read these from right to left (eg, *tow* and *two*; *pot* and *top; form* and *from*).

English has many 'consonant clusters' (for example, the first syllables of words like black; fluid; programme; plate; grape; glimpse; throw; spell; stand). But such 'consonant clusters' don't occur in single syllables in Farsi – this explains why Afghan refugees have a strong tendency to add in a short vowel sound (spoken much like the first e of 'ever') either before or in the middle of the English clusters (ie, *pelate* for plate; *geround* for ground; *estart* for start). This 'intrusive vowel sound' is especially common in speaking the initial cluster *sl* (eg slate; slow) or when using clusters with three letters: spl (split); spr (spring); str (street); scr (scream): these produce sounds like *esplit*; *espring; estreet; escream....*

In spoken Farsi, *stress is always placed on the final syllable of a word*. This can create difficulty for Farsi-speakers who are beginners in English, because spoken English conveys a huge range of different meanings both through 'clustering' of syllables and by *placing stress on different words in a sentence*. (To illustrate this point, see the exercises on pp. 27-28 above - 'Rhythm of speech and placing of stress on a word in a sentence in English'.)

Question marks and commas in written Farsi are inverted (and so appear to British native English-speakers like 'back to front' mistakes). *Quotation marks are not customarily used in Farsi* - this in effect means that reported speech is often not conveyed clearly as such when using English. (For example, you may hear 'She said I'm feeling hungry (meaning 'She said she was feeling hungry'; or 'She asked are you warm?' - meaning 'She asked if I was warm…'; 'He said I am cold' - meaning 'He said 'I am cold''.)

Centre for Intercultural Development (CICD)

Grammatical differences: why do Farsi-speakers speak English as they do? What makes it difficult for them to learn English?

As Farsi is an Indo-European language, in spoken form it is a bit more similar to English than the Semitic language Arabic.

However, below is a list of grammatical differences (drawn from 'Learner English', ed. Swan and Smith, CUP) for you to review with Farsi-speaking refugees: they help explain what Afghan refugees find difficult about learning English, and why their spoken English often seems to British volunteers to embody mistakes and curious oddities of expression.

Word order in Farsi is different from English:

- In Farsi, the usual word order is *subject, object, verb* (not, as in English, subject, verb, object). This can lead to confusion for refugee beginners in English. Until they get used to the English word sequence, they may say 'I girl young saw' - for 'I saw a young girl'.
- Adjectives normally *follow the nouns they modify.* Taken together with verbs appearing at the end of sentences, this ordering of adjectives can also lead to awkwardness in translating into English (eg, 'A man tall in the office I met'.)
- In Farsi, *adverbs of time are customarily placed between subject and object* (so resulting in 'I yesterday telephoned her' instead of 'Yesterday I telephoned her')
- In Farsi *there is no verb 'to be': the equivalent meaning of the verb 'to be' is often added to nouns as a suffix rather than used in its full form.* As a result, many Farsi-speakers leave out this verb when speaking in English, at least at first. ('She a teacher' instead of 'She is a teacher'.)
- A difficulty experienced by Farsi-speakers is that instead of saying 'washing machine' their equivalent would be 'machine washing'.

Asking Questions

- *The English word 'do' has no direct equivalent in Farsi.* So Farsi-speakers often use a rising tone alone to ask questions in English, ie, they overlook the use in English of 'do' and 'did': ('When you started school?' or 'When you left Afghanistan?' rather than 'When did you….')
- Farsi has *very few question tags* (a question word 'Na' is used to cover most query situations). As a result, beginners in English tend to say 'You told me you can help me, no?' rather than 'Didn't you tell me…'?
- Farsi makes a particular reaction to a negative question - ie, 'chera?', which means in effect 'Why not?' or 'Isn't that correct?'. Unfortunately, when transposed directly into English, 'Why not?' as a reaction can sound a bit blunt or even peremptory and rebuffing in manner. To avoid this, it might be helpful to advise newly arrived Farsi-speakers not to use the 'Why not?' formulation in English until they have acquired a more nuanced range of vocabulary for making polite replies.

Negatives

- In Farsi, *first, second, and third person verb endings become part of the verb.* Because of this, they can turn a statement into a negative simply by making a prefix 'na' - which applies both in the present and in the past tense. Influenced by this, Farsi-speaking beginners in English often use the term 'Not' in a similar way - ie, saying 'He not go down road' - instead of 'He doesn't/didn't go down the road'.

Articles

- The English *definite and indefinite articles, 'the' and 'a', don't exist in Farsi* - suffixes are added to nouns to indicate whether they are definite or indefinite. This can create confusion for Farsi-speakers when using English.
- As already noted under 'Verbs' above, *the equivalent of the verb 'to be' in Farsi is often added to nouns as a suffix rather than used in its full form* – as a result, Farsi-speakers often leave out this verb when first speaking in English. ('She a teacher' instead of 'She is a teacher'.)
- *As there is no definite article 'the' in Farsi*, refugees may misapply this term confusingly in English. For example, although names are nouns, in English we don't use the word 'the' before a name. But when using English, Farsi-speakers may refer to someone as 'The Ben' or 'The Janina': ie, they may *add articles to nouns* when they are not needed. (Or say 'I go to the school every day' - for 'I go to school every day'. 'In Spring the nature is refreshing' - for 'In Spring nature is refreshing')
- Equally, Farsi-speakers may *leave out articles before nouns* when they <u>are</u> needed in English. ('She is best' for 'She is the best'; 'Irish are friendly' for 'The Irish are friendly'; 'English always talk about weather' for '...the weather')

Verbs

For Farsi-speakers, handling the grammar of English is more difficult than handling the vocabulary. While most Afghans are used to learning terms/words off by heart, their greater difficulty is when to use verbs like 'was', 'were' and 'been', as these words don't change in Farsi's tenses as much as in English tenses.

- *Past tense:*

  In Farsi, *the past tense is equivalent to both the present perfect and the simple past tense* in English. As a result, a Farsi speaker may well choose the wrong tense when using English. (eg, 'I lost my bag' for 'I have lost…')

- *The past progressive tense in Farsi is formed with the equivalent of 'to have'.* Thus, a Farsi-speaker might say 'When I arrived, he had eating his dinner' (meaning 'When I arrived, he was eating his dinner').

- *Present tense:*

  In Farsi, *the present tense has several possible uses*:

  - it can be used for a *current action* ('She reads book' meaning 'She's reading a book')
  - it can be used for an *action starting in the past and continuous* ('I live in this country for three years' - meaning 'I have lived…')

- and confusingly, it can also be used for a *future action* (so producing in English the formulation 'She comes next month' for 'She will come …)

- *Future tense:*

  As another form of future tense, Farsi uses the equivalent term 'to want'. This is very formal, and so is not used in everyday speech, but it can lead a Farsi-speaker to say in English 'I want to see you next week', meaning 'I will see you next week'.

Modal verbs

- Farsi doesn't have the range of meanings that are expressed by *modal* verbs in English. Confusion can arise because the equivalent of 'must' in Farsi is used to apply to *both present and past* tenses. The huge range of meanings expressed in English by modal verbs - eg, 'could', 'must', 'should', 'have to', 'ought to', 'need to', etc. - is expressed in Farsi by using just one modal verb: differences of meaning are then conveyed by adding supplementary phrases.
- Particular confusion can arise because the equivalent of 'must' in Farsi is used to apply to both present and past tenses.
- *As Farsi has no gerund form (ie, verbal nouns) the infinitive form is usually used in its place.* (Reflecting this, a Farsi-speaker is liable to say 'Instead to shout out, they ran off' meaning 'Instead of shouting out, they ran off…')

People as Subjects

- In Farsi, *there are no separate words to define 'he' and 'she' - a single pronoun is used for both.* As a result, Farsi-speakers may refer to someone in English as 'he' instead of 'she'. ('My daughter is a teacher. He goes to school every day'.)
- *There are two forms of 'you' in Farsi*: 'tou' and 'shoma'. 'Tou' is informal whereas 'shoma' can mean 'you' in addressing someone formally, or to say 'you all'.

Comparatives

- *Farsi creates comparatives by adding a suffix*, so beginners in English might say 'She is more better' (for 'she is better'); or 'this crossing is dangerouser'.
- The preposition used with comparatives in Farsi is the equivalent of 'from' in English. So you may well hear: 'Her coat is longer from mine' (for '...than mine').

Subordinate clauses

- *There is only one relative pronoun in Farsi, which is used equally for humans, animals and objects*. It is used when the pronoun is either the subject or the object of the verb, or when a possessive is needed. So, choosing the correct pronoun is a difficult task for beginners when learning English.
- *The Farsi equivalents of 'although' and 'but' can be used in the same sentence.* (This can produce 'Although he was not well, but he ran the race'.)
- *Conjunctions are used much more often in Farsi* than in English usage - especially at the start of sentences. You'll find that Afghan refugees tend to join many clauses together with the word 'and'.

Additional linguistic cultural differences

- *Phrasal verbs do not exist in Farsi* - so they create confusion for Farsi-speakers in learning English (especially metaphorical phrasal verbs which are likely to be heard literally – eg, 'keep an eye on….'; 'rain cats and dogs'; 'get cold feet'; 'beat about the bush'; 'spill the beans'; 'eat humble pie'; 'play it by ear'; 'stand up and be counted' 'led down the garden path' .....)
- *Ownership has a first and a second form in Farsi*. To indicate ownership you can say 'book-my' in the first form or 'book-[with an ending according to subject]'. The form you choose depends on how much you want to emphasise ownership. It is also common to add an 'e' sound to the end of a word to indicate ownership.
- *Colloquial (spoken) Farsi differs from written Farsi*. The written Farsi is used in news reports, in books, newspapers, and formal letters. For example, the verb 'to be' in its present tense changes from the written Farsi 'ast' to the colloquial 'eh'. In some terms the 'an' also changes to 'un'. So instead of saying 'nan' (bread), it would be pronounced 'noon'.
- *With the growth of social media and messaging*, more and more Farsi-speakers now use non-standardised transliteration of Persian words in the Latin alphabet.
- *Numbers are written from left to right and read from left to right* - so there are generally few difficulties with these when learning English.
- *A solar calendar* is used in Iran and Afghanistan: this is called the Persian calendar or the Jalaali calendar. While the calendar has 12 months, the year begins at 'Nowruz' and marks the first day of 'Farvardin'. Note that in the UK, the Gregorian calendar is followed, such that in Iran and Afghanistan, the year 2021 is the year 1400 - this means that it is sometimes difficult for refugees to recall dates, as they have to convert the dates into the Gregorian calendar.
- The first day of the week is recognised as Saturday or 'schambe' and Friday is considered as a day of rest - as Sunday would be considered in the UK.
- Instead of saying 'am' or 'pm' or using the 24-hour clock, time is indicated by saying the word for morning/afternoon/evening, together with the time.

………………………………………………………………………………………

Further training resources for use with volunteers and refugees:

'Arc of the Journeyman' is a book drawing on an in-depth survey of Afghan refugees by sociologist Nichola Khan, reader in the School of Social Sciences at University of Brighton [Muslim International Series, University of Minnesota Press, 2021].

As a stimulus to discussion of volunteers' reactions to Islam, a 45 mins BBC documentary video, 'Attitudes to Islam', shows British volunteers as they work as teachers in an Islamic society - Pakistan - and reflect on their intercultural experiences. Notes on using the film with discussion groups are set out on pp 53 ff below. A copy of the video can be obtained via 'We Transfer' on request from **cicd.jt@gmail.com**

4: 'TALK IT OVER' - notes for facilitating discussion exercises prompted by training videos

This section offers training videos with group discussion exercises for trainers and facilitators to use in developing the intercultural communication skills needed by volunteers to handle cultural differences effectively. The aim is less to 'instruct' volunteers, but rather *to prompt them to share experiences between themselves and so establish tips of good practice from each other*. With practice, trainers/facilitators will of course deploy the handouts and videos in ways they find effective – however, to get started, these notes describe how the videos and guides listed below are designed for use as visual aids or as 'trigger stimulus' to group discussions with fellow volunteers, and/or with refugees, or (best of all) with both jointly.

For separate copies of these 'Talk it over' Notes, Videos and Guides, and for copies of the Videos 1 - 4 listed below and available via 'We Transfer', email **cicd.jt@gmail.com**

VIDEO 1: 'Volunteers in support of Refugees and Person seeking asylums' [p 40 ff]

1. Volunteer Charlotte's Journey
2. Oasis Cardiff Christmas Party
3. Hamid's story – the open door
4. Refugee Week Storytelling zoom meeting at Oasis Cardiff

VIDEO 2: 'Communicating with speakers of Arabic'

1. 'The Chaos': this is a long verse, written by a Dutchman, that demonstrates the variety and arbitrariness of English pronunciation. Watching it recited on screen will develop any volunteer's understanding and patience in helping refugees learn English.

2. '8 excellent signs Arabs use all the time': an amusing piece by an Arab American.

3. 'Gestures and other non-verbal communication in Arabic': a serious introduction.

4. 'The Arabic Language – its amazing history and features': 15 mins exposition of the Arabic language. (An intensive presentation – ideally viewed twice.)

VIDEO 3: 'Attitudes to Islam' [p 53 ff]   This broadcast documentary shows British volunteers sharing experience of working as VSO teachers in Pakistan.

VIDEO 4: 'Crosstalk'   [p 59 ff; and pp 61 ff]   This training documentary film is widely used as an introduction to intercultural communication. It offers a detailed case-study of how misunderstandings occur in recruitment interviews between people from different cultural backgrounds, even when all parties are using English fluently.

Centre for Intercultural Development (CICD)

INTRODUCTION   Some training topics are familiar enough. They include:
- helping refugees and people seeking asylum to adapt to practical living in the UK (eg shopping, sporting activities, cooking, seeking work, practising use of IT, etc)
- assisting refugees to deal with officialdom - legal/bureaucratic issues and filling in forms (eg preparing claims re immigration status and/or benefits, letters of verification, etc)
- supporting refugees in coping with health issues, both physical (eg, prescriptions) and mental (eg, tackling traumas, insecurity, anxiety, and isolation from family and cultural roots)
- helping to teach English, and/or giving practice to refugees in reading/writing English.

So, what themes do these 'Talk it over' training materials cover?
These materials have been written by John Twitchin of CICD, in association with SIETAR UK, and Refugee Centre Oasis Cardiff, to broaden that training agenda to cover:

1. Discussion of the *'empathy-building' benefits, for both volunteers and refugees, of sharing and reflecting on 'life stories'* [Video 1]

2. Reviewing one's role as a *white* volunteer in relation to the realities of prejudice & racist discrimination as faced by refugees who are perceived as *black* people [Video 1, sequences 1+ 4]

3. *'Communicating Interculturally'* [Guide 1 in this booklet (pp 4-17) and Video 4]. Introduction to *awareness* of how misunderstandings occur between refugees and native-English speakers, with *practical skills* to act as one's own 'cultural mediator'.

4. *'Communicating with speakers of ARABIC'* [Guide 2 in this booklet (pp 18 – 32), to use with the 15 mins sequence 4 of Video 2.]

5. *'Communicating with speakers of FARSI'* [Guide 3 in this booklet (pp 33 - 38).

6. Video to prompt discussion of *awareness of, and attitudes towards, Islam*. [cf p 53]

7. *Review of Terminology* used to describe minority ethnic groups. [pp 51 ff]

8. Role-play Exercises to assist refugees in *social usage of English*. [p 55 ff]

9. Exercises to help refugees in preparing for *job recruitment interviews*. [pp 57 ff]

10. *Potential Handouts on communication for trainers/facilitators to deploy*: 'Cultural Contrasts' [pp 8 – 11]; 'Tips for Communicating Interculturally' [pp 11 – 13]; 'Intercultural Intonation and placing of stress' [pp 27 – 29 + p 62]; '3 levels of analysis' [p 61] 'Handling of cultural differences' [p 67]; 'Cultural differences in Turn-taking' [p 68]; 'Using idiomatic and figurative expressions' [pp 69 – 72]

Those resources 1-10 on the theme of communicating interculturally with refugees can be explored in individual study, but ideally, they would be covered on a group basis with fellow volunteers, and in shared activities and discussion with refugees. These Notes are addressed to trainers and facilitators, providing an agenda of group discussion exercises prompted by showings of the documentary films and the three print guides.

VIDEO 1: 'Volunteers in support of Refugees and People seeking asylum'

This training video comprises four documentary extracts drawn from the website of refugee centre 'Oasis Cardiff.' It begins with a personal statement comment by a volunteer which prompts some issues for volunteers' group reflection and discussion. [(However, if you or your volunteer group want to meet with Syrian or Sudanese refugees immediately, you could opt to start with 'The Christmas Party' SEQUENCE 2 (at 3 mins 10 secs).]

Charlotte's Journey (Duration: 3.08)

Charlotte is a white woman volunteer who recounts an 8-day sponsored trek to a mountain-top in Africa, during which she and the rest of her guided group were dependent on a local all-black support team. She raises two main themes for discussion:

Agenda Theme 1: What does it mean to 'share one's life story' experiences as a step in self-development and self-reliance – both with fellow volunteers, and also with refugees?

00.11 'Hello, my name is Charlotte…
…. It's one of the best experiences I've ever had.' *02.29* Optional PAUSE
Charlotte comments: 'Getting to the top of Kilimanjaro was very emotional for me…it was an awesome experience that helped me discover what I am capable of.' Thus, her journey proved to be more than tourist curiosity: it significantly developed Charlotte's sense of self-identity/self-reliance and self-discovery via personal and group achievement.
Discussion prompts:
Optional 'icebreaker' topics for volunteers to share/exchange in pairs/small groups:
- Have we, as volunteers, had similarly emotionally stretching and significant life events in the course of our own 'cultural journeys' or 'life events' to date?
- Have the refugees we work with exchanged 'life story' accounts of their experiences (especially concerning leaving their homeland to get to the UK)?
- As a step to responding supportively, what sensitivities and skills of intercultural communication would help us draw out the emotional dimensions of refugees' stories?

Agenda Theme 2: Refugees bring a wide range of cultural differences from their countries of origin to the UK. However, Charlotte brings on to the discussion agenda a particular dimension of cultural difference that is sometimes overlooked: as a *white* volunteer she has chosen to support the charity Oasis particularly because of its commitment to refugees who are *black*. She observes that as an anti-racist organisation, Oasis Cardiff helps refugees and people seeking asylum to come to terms not only with the trauma of leaving their families/homelands (in Syria, Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen…) but also the trauma of meeting with prejudiced attitudes and 'race discrimination', both overt and subtle, as they seek to adjust to life here in the UK.

02.32 'I chose Oasis Cardiff…'
03.12 '…. warm Welsh welcome we hope people would get.'
Charlotte commends Oasis for backing the 'Black Lives Matter' movement. For her, this is an important element in helping remedy the 'unwelcoming reactions' that black refugees are liable to encounter while 'acculturating' to British society.

Group Discussion: Does our group agree with Charlotte? Have those of us who are *white* sufficiently equipped to win the confidence of refugees in developing the self-identity and resilience they need to cope with being perceived in the UK as *black* (or so-called 'persons of colour')? Putting it another way: How *convincingly* can those of us who are white support black refugees in coming to terms with the social realities of anti-black prejudice and racism they will encounter here in the UK?

Related agenda topic: **handling differences of religion**

A related issue for volunteers: how well are those of us who are *non-Muslim* equipped to share understanding/ insights/ practices in supporting Muslims from Africa and Middle-East? Especially in helping to recognise and handle the symptoms of Islamophobia that refugees are liable to encounter in the UK? A training option for group exploration of this dimension of intercultural difference is to view Video 3, the 45 mins documentary '**Attitudes to Islam**' (outlined in Notes for facilitators from p 53 below). This documentary shows British volunteers engaging with Muslims while working as volunteer teachers and social workers in Pakistan. It could be used in association with the self-learning guide above: '**Communicating with Arabic-speakers'.**

Observation: Charlotte's comment reminds us that helping refugees to develop a sense of positive identity for living in UK society is not a one-way process – ie, it's not something that benefits only refugees and people seeking asylum but also ourselves as volunteers. Most refugees have been shaped by a different language and religious culture from most British volunteers; they now need to re-shape a new sense of belonging in an unfamiliar social and cultural environment. This this should not be a one-sided, assimilationist exercise: rather, a joint, interactive activity. Some British volunteers may need help to move on from a limited perspective of 'monocultural' habits/ patterns of thought and behaviour, to relate creatively and empathetically to others in a 'pluralistic' multi-cultural society which is enriched by cultures and communities from many different parts of the world. Basically, in broadening our own cultural awareness and skills, as volunteers we also have 'life stories' or 'cultural journeys' to reflect on and exchange. Our *open-mindedness and powers of social empathy* are strengthened by joint activities and discussion of cultural differences with fellow volunteers and with refugees and people seeking asylum.

Oasis Cardiff Christmas Party (Duration 1.40)

Discussion prompt: This video sequence introduces us on-screen to both refugees and volunteers. You might ask your group to *note down as they watch what are for them the Key Phrases* in what we hear – ie what for them are significant points worthy of follow-up discussion.

03.10 'I came from Ethiopia…'
04.50 ' …..I like it'.

[Examples of Key Phrases: 'Everyone is valued, wherever they're from'. 'To help make them feel part of the community is an essential part of adapting to life here.' 'It's the sharing of cultures that makes this community feel like home']

Observation: This local tv news item shows a Christmas party organised by Oasis Cardiff (complete with a 'live' Father Christmas figure!). This is an *intercultural* social event: most of the refugees are Muslims (from Sudan and Syria) – so nothing alcoholic is served. The event symbolises the benefits of social exchange and joint activities in helping overcome refugees' isolation/alienation and difficulties of adaptation to Britain. It is a reminder of how *social contact and group activity* can significantly help restore a refugee's resilience as they 'acculturate' to living in the UK. For all of us, participating in *communal activities* helps 'take one out of oneself'. Joining in group activities helps us to compare and reflect on our experiences – it helps us reassess cultural perspectives that we otherwise take for granted. It's also worth noting a key cultural difference: while the culture of the UK is generally *individualist,* refugees and people seeking asylum who come from Africa and the M-East generally embody *collective* values*.*

Discussion prompt: Following the model of Oasis Cardiff, what *group/communal activities* do we engage in with refugees in our own locality? Have we talked to refugees and people seeking asylum about what social/ group activities might attract them?

Group activities for building social rapport across cultural differences

Bank holiday and other Festival events - Birthday parties - Sporting activities (eg football, ping-pong, cricket - especially taking account of sports popular in refugees' countries of origin) - exchanging Recipes, as part of sharing traditions of food hospitality (in a new initiative in 2021 Oasis was able to introduce Mongolian!) - exchanging and comparing Proverbs (the 'wisdom of cultures') – sharing of Lullabies and folk songs – Singing (or humming along) along in a choir - playing musical instruments – Dance sessions/classes - helping with building or mechanical repairs (Oasis has a bicycle repair shop) – daytrips/ excursions to museums – engaging socially in religious festivity/observances such as Ramadan, Eid, etc, (volunteers can build rapport and solidarity by joining in with fasting at least during the day) - visiting a mosque, church, temple, gurdwara, synagogue - relating to the local community by helping with a food bank/ clothes bank/ shoes collection – sharing creative arts and crafts, eg woodcarving; designing/printing celebratory cards with drawings; discussing favourite colour/favourite trees/appeal of pets; exchanging embroidery and dress-making designs in a Sewing circle (perhaps with a fashion show!) - practising of IT skills – 'book club' meetings to talk over reviews or to collect books to read to children or for them to practise colouring in – Social club to talk over TV reviews/ criticism – Gardening of 'home' veg and herbs in a 'wild patch' or in an allotment (this is especially rich a platform for intercultural exchange with local residents) - Walking/cycling excursions in town or country (also good to restore a calming sense of 'back to nature') - and of course, not least, helping our local language teachers by giving refugees practice in 'conversational English' (ESOL).

Discussion prompt: Are we careful to ensure that such group activities are not exclusionary – ie, do we take trouble to consider the location, the time of day, the food and drink on offer? And have we considered whether in some cases, activities may be of more interest to women rather than men, or vice versa (while avoiding simplistic stereotypes/assumptions)?

Discussion prompt: do we display a 'multi-faith' calendar of festivals on our walls, to demonstrate our multi-cultural values? Indeed, might we follow the example of a refugee centre

which, alongside a multi-lingual 'Welcome' sign to which refugees can add a greeting written in their own mother-tongue, posts a sign 'You are now entering Anti-racist Territory' in their entrance hall? Would such a public display remind *us,* as volunteers, of our declared and shared values, as well give visible reassurance to refugees who come from Africa and the Middle-East?

Hamid's story (Duration 1.45 mins)

04.53 'I lived in Syria, near Aleppo…'
06.32 ' ….give something back'

Discussion prompt: Note to your viewing group that while we hear Hamid telling his story on-screen, we don't actually get to see him. Why do we think Hamid chose to tell his story not through a 'selfie' image on camera but via a set of tile designs and drawings?

Observation: As a tiler, Hamid prefers to tell his story via designs and illustrative drawings. He is not just recounting his journey to the UK in his own way. In this way he is implying an indirect message, namely: "Look at me. With my craftsman's skills ('I loved my job'); I was recognised as SOMEONE in Syria, but here as a displaced person unable to work ('the door is closed') my skills are not recognised - it makes me feel like Nobody." [Similar sense of humiliation, disillusion + frustration at 'lack of agency' is expressed by refugees in the next sequence.]

'The door is closed'…By this phrase, Hamid is referring to the blockages placed on people who seek asylum in seeking legal work in the UK. He has left his wife and four children in Syria while searching for work in Lebanon… Turkey…Greece…Germany. 'But the door was closed; then I remembered Great Britain - a country with human rights, where I hope to make a new life for my family.' We can note that in addition to earning income for family and gaining dignity and recognition by working, Hamid would like to 'to give something back' for the welcome he has found in Wales. Use of geometric designs also, of course, reflects the (non-representational) style of Islamic art and crafts.

Discussion prompt:

1. How can we, as volunteers, assist refugees to pursue their professional/ occupational skills while they are stuck, often for years on end, without work?

2. And how can we, once they obtain leave to remain, help refugees to prepare for communicating successfully in interviews to secure work? [See the role-play exercises, pp 58 ff and Video 4, on recruitment interviews.]

Oasis Cardiff: Volunteers in support of refugees - 'We each have a story to tell' (16 mins)

This sequence brings onto the discussion agenda: *How exchanging stories* (of 'life events') *builds mutual empathy,* both in relation to refugees and to our fellow volunteers*.

Observation: In introducing this documentary, which indicates the benefits of 'sharing life stories' or 'cultural journeys', you might draw your trainees' attention to the fact that we all

act the way we *see* things; and that we *treat people* according to *how we see them*. This prompts the question: how do we, both as individuals and as a group of British volunteers, perceive and react to the range of cultural and ethnic differences that refugees and people seeking asylum bring to the UK? Of course, we do our best to demonstrate respect for such differences, as part of making people feel welcome and well supported. We want to contribute to helping reinforce their positive self-identity, especially following the stresses involved in journeying to the UK. But once they have arrived, 'becoming acculturated' needs to involve more than learning basic English and getting familiar with the practicalities of how British society works. They are likely to need assistance in developing the 'functional competence' for handling the discovery that they are perceived by many people in the UK (and so described and treated) as an 'immigrant of Black and Asian Minority Ethnic background' or as a 'person of colour'. This 'white/black' dimension of intercultural communication is sometimes overlooked in training of volunteers (some of whom find it an 'overly sensitive' issue for discussion). Through this documentary of an Oasis Cardiff 'story-telling' meeting, we hear what refugees themselves have to say about this issue.

Discussion prompt: Before viewing this documentary of a zoom meeting, alert your group that in one or two places the speaker's on-screen image is inadvertently lost because of camera slippage [eg, for some 60 seconds at c 12. 39]. However, reassure them that the sound track is clear and continuous throughout – they'll be able to follow this refugee-led exchange of life stories perfectly well.

Discussion prompt: As an assist to discussion, ask the members of your group to note what for them are *Key Phrases* heard at the on-screen meeting – ie, points they think worthy of follow-up reflection and discussion. *Pause* the viewing as necessary, to give them a chance to scribble down their notes. In this way, your group will in effect be joining in this 'storytelling' meeting actively and empathetically, not merely passively. And the group's post-viewing discussion agenda will be set, not by anecdotes and talk *about* refugees, but in response to topics and issues *raised directly by refugees, speaking for themselves in their own terms*. The Notes below indicate some key phrases/points, together with discussion questions, to help you in making back references in facilitated discussion.

Cautionary Observation: Eliciting/handling emotive 'life stories' or 'cultural journeys'.
In showing this Oasis zoom meeting as a model of sharing refugees' life stories, a trainer/facilitator needs to be ready to handle carefully a short emotional upset that briefly overcomes one of the African refugees (at 14.20 mins). This expression of distress must not be left 'under-contextualised', ie, simply viewed passively for its dramatic effect or curiosity value – ie, as mere emotional voyeurism.
Some key points to underline and review:
1. Invite your group to report how they perceive the *overall dynamic* of this meeting. Did they notice how the black refugees and people seeking asylum 'have the floor' and develop the storytelling agenda in their own ways, while the white volunteers choose not to speak, but rather, to *adopt a role of active listening*.
2. Ensure that your group notices how deeply everyone is moved when the African refugee is overwhelmed by his feelings (perhaps significantly, this happens at 14.20, just as he is reflecting on the critical value of having reliable friendship in one's life - 'He's been like a brother to me….'). Note the empathy that is expressed (even though it is only remotely) through the body language of the (mainly white)

volunteers (both men and women); note too, how no white volunteers intervene verbally at the point of upset: they take their role as to 'be there', using the power of silence to demonstrate empathetic respect for the supportive responses made by the other refugees (who are mainly black and Muslim, both men and women). Oasis Cardiff has modelled here a powerful *communicative context or platform of exchange* that demonstrates positive respect for the agenda and the emotional dimensions of the stories that the refugees share in their own style/terms. As a platform of exchange the meeting avoids risk of implied 'white dominance' or patronising approaches - ie, no white volunteers seek to 'speak for' the black refugees and people seeking asylum. This platform of conversation is the refugees' own: they speak for themselves in their own ways – something both the refugees and the volunteers warmly engage in, and jointly appreciate.

3. Check if your group have observed how in this Oasis meeting we don't just hear *what* each refugee chooses to say: we see the volunteers creating a supportive and enabling group environment in which each refugee *can readily share his/her vulnerability in saying it*.

4. You could note too how the group atmosphere helps ensure that the participant refugees are not seen or projected in the recording simply as victims. Jointly with the Oasis Cardiff volunteers, we see how these refugees do more than relate and empathise with each other: they contribute *positive initiatives* in sustained joint support along with the volunteers.

Key phrases on-screen

06.34 'My name is…from Sudan…' [he goes on to recount being sent from Croydon to Cardiff] '….On reflection, I'm going to stay here for the rest of my life, if possible'*. (…08.56)*

08.58 'My name is…' [he goes on to celebrate being now domiciled with wife and child in County Wexford in Ireland] …. 'Of course, I miss my homeland [in E. Africa], that's my heritage. But here I've found a new home'…. 'I'm really happy that we're sharing these stories with each other: We should be meeting and exchanging like this on a weekly basis! This is brilliant.'

10.42 'I am….' [this person seeking asylum reports on his eight years in the UK, three of them in Cardiff.] 'The white people of Wales should be proud of themselves for being welcoming.' 'I was able to ask a GP for my mental health…that was a big step.' 'I love the learning process at Oasis community, eg, choir, football team.'

12.39 *[This is where there is a loss of picture as the speaker's camera slips from its position. But the sound quality remains clear and continuous.]* 'All the stories we've heard are positive…but we need also to recognise the negativity … to recognise how much negativity some people face'… 'I think, through these platforms, the issue we need to discuss most is the side that is negative'. 'I love the fact that we own this platform and are celebrating how positive our experiences have been; but we should not forget the negative side, because you have to understand that not everyone is happy that you're sitting in the spot that you're sitting in – you are going to face people who don't like you being where you are - for no reason, but just because you are who you are. But these conversations breed

getting rid of the negativity that happens when people come to seek asylum. So, I think we need to have conversations especially around the negative experiences.'

14.20 'The best friend is someone you can call when you're down'. 'When you wake up in the morning you can feel you're nothing, a waste of space, you're nobody, not human….' 'But when I'm down, a friend is always there – as a brother'. [He is here briefly overcome with distress.] 'When you can't work, how can you survive on £35 a week?' (2021) 'It's all too much'. 'We have to try to raise our voice'   *[16.56]* .'But, Oasis is like a family to me…thanks, everybody.'

17.12 'I can feel what you are going through…' 'I love my country, but I just had to leave.'

17.46 'You know what… I can relate. BUT, things are changing, bit by bit. By us having these conversations, it is a step forward. It's not that easy for men to break down and cry… It takes a lot…It takes a toll on everyone …If you haven't walked in someone's shoes, you can't understand what they're going through.' 'This is a hardship that no-one should have to endure, but Ayyub, listen to me: Life is hard, but it does get better. Hang on in there…'

[20.00] 'Thanks for arranging this conversation. It's mentally draining… but this has been a true depiction of the refugee experience.'

21.03 'Move on…and we'll get together soon to dance, sing and eat food…But if you have any issue, ring me at any time. We can get a bit emotional, but we need to listen to each other…this is the main thing'.

22.15 'Thank you, everyone, for being so open and allowing yourself to be vulnerable. Know that you are <u>being heard</u>. A purpose of today is to team up with the Cardiff Museum to record everyone's stories. This way everyone's contribution will never get lost in Cardiff's history…it becomes part of the personal identity of all of us; it helps us build relationships with people who have gone through such hardships. Thank you for sharing.'

Discussion prompts:

- How does that meeting compare with exchanges of 'life stories' we have experienced

   with refugees in our locality? Do our meetings to share significant events across cultures include 'active listening' – ie, 'reaching out' through empathy, emotional expressiveness and building of rapport? Have we experienced the benefits of such 'conversations' as reported by the refugees – especially of volunteers 'being there', ie, demonstrating empathy for refugees' feelings of anxiety and loss of agency, rather than simply reporting and exchanging anecdotes of successes?

- What Key Phrases, or points worthy of follow-up discussion, did the volunteers in your

   viewing group note down? Ask them to share out loud what they wrote in their notes. Did they cite the points/Key Phrases listed in these Notes? Did they any constructive observations on how the meeting was set up and conducted?

- How do we assess how refugees in our own locality are managing to cope with the ups and downs of 'acculturating'/ 'integrating'? In particular, what do we think the person seeking asylum meant at *10.42* in commenting that 'the local white people in Wales should be proud of themselves'? What can we assume the volunteers at Oasis have done in support of refugees, such that he uses the descriptive term 'local white people'?

- What 'good community practices' are mentioned at Oasis Cardiff, that volunteers in other localities could adopt? (There is a sample list of group activities under 'Party' on p 43.).

- Key Point: What do we reckon the refugee meant at *12.39* when he said (and repeated, in order to reinforce his point) 'All the stories we've heard are positive…but we also need to recognise how much *negativity* some people face'?

Observation: To remind your group of what was said (especially if they got a bit distracted by the camera slippage at that point), read out the quote set out above at 12.39 (cf p 46 above). This long-established refugee from East Africa acknowledges the benefits of 'sharing our stories' and celebrating the supportive welcome they have experienced at Oasis Cardiff. (For him, such are the psychological benefits that he declares 'We should be doing these conversations every week'.) He mentions his own positive story (of being happily settled with his family in County Wexford in Ireland); and he acknowledges that tracing individual refugees' long or short-term stories of achieving success can be an inspiration to others. But at the same time, he emphasises that sharing and celebrating individual success stories should not come at the price of omitting to engage with the realities of 'the negativity that some refugees face'.

Discussion prompt (What is meant by the term 'negativity'?):

- Specifically, what is our group understanding of what this refugee *means* by the term **'negativity'?** What do we each think his fellow black refugees have taken him to mean? And what do we think the majority of the white volunteers at the Oasis meeting are taking him to mean?

- Is 'negativity' a term used by refugees in our locality? Could it be a euphemism for finding oneself on the receiving end of personal 'anti-black' prejudice/rebuff? Or is it a way of sharing the 'negative experience' of anxiety and uncertainty about being perceived as 'non-white' in a 'white-dominant' society which remains blighted by disproportionate anti-black discrimination/ treatment?

Observation: Could 'negativity' refer simply to failure to find work/income? And/or to a sense of rejection/rebuff as a 'foreigner'? And/or anxiety whether a 'foreign accent' is acceptable (ie, is regarded/treated positively, or negatively as an irritating cause of impatience)? Or is the term referring to how 'migrant status' is regarded/treated by official authorities at the Home Office – especially given the stress and frustration of being 'stuck' with literally years of waiting for 'leave to remain'? Or does he mean the more subtle experience of living with uncertainty about whether they are going to encounter prejudice in being perceived as 'black' - and/or in meeting with *institutional* discriminatory treatment (something often too subtle for some refugees to recognise)? Put another way, is he referring to feeling undermined by uncertainty and insecurity

as to whether his/her 'blackness' will be treated as a positive attribute by the majority white population? (*14.15* 'Let's face it – there are people who just don't like you being who you are, and sitting where you're sitting')

Or does he mean by the word 'negativity' the self-doubt and frustrating 'loss of agency' that any of us would feel if we can't access jobs or establish grip/control/influence over the decision-making processes that affect us? Or is it some combination of these factors?

Discussion prompt (about inhibitions over discussing negativity):

- Why do we think this refugee chooses to *repeat* his point about 'negativity'?

Observation: Has he perhaps found that some white British volunteers avoid talking about refugees' experiences as a black person – ie, that they feel inhibited or self-conscious about raising 'negativity' as an 'overly emotive' topic? Perhaps they mask this by the claim that they are 'respecting people's privacy'. (Evasion of discussion of hidden black/ white power relations is sometimes referred to as the 'dis-ease' of subtle and unwitting white racism.)

Perhaps some white volunteers feel inhibited about tackling the subject of anti-black prejudice and discrimination because they are uncertain about *how* to deal with it - ie, they feel unsure how easily a white person *can* help handle it without risk of being patronising, or of colluding in tokenist approaches, or of marginalising black people in the operation of decision-making. (This opens the discussion topic: how to translate anti-racist personal 'good intentions' into practical and effective group action?)

On this theme, a potential discussion prompt is the documentary **VIDEO 'Children without prejudice'.** This BBC documentary shows pioneering black and white teachers seeking to develop the sense of self-identity and of social awareness among both black and white children, and at both early years and secondary level. (For free copy via 'We Transfer', email **cicd.jt@gmail.com**)

Discussion prompt (about the importance of talking about this):

- What do we, as a group, take the speaker from East Africa to mean when he says 'these conversations breed getting rid of the negativity that happens when people come to seek asylum'? Is he recommending, in effect, that as volunteers we should encourage a refugee or person seeking asylum who is experiencing low mood, stress, frustration (or helplessness leading to apathy and 'loss of agency') to find relief in social exchange?

Observation: There are several aspects here:
1. For everyone it can be helpful to talk through problems and difficulties informally. Sharing 'where we are at' in mood/feelings is basic to building rapport, trust and friendship. We also know that any form of distress is horrible to experience alone. But in engaging with refugees, we may need to bear in mind that *cultures vary in how formal or informal to be in communicating about feelings.* How can we best 'feel out', what level of familiarity a refugee is comfortable with and feels to be appropriate? If we see that some volunteers are more skilled than us at eliciting and handling 'life stories' across cultures, what could we learn from them?
2. At the meeting a refugee says 'It takes a lot to make a man cry' and 'I wanted to protect my young son from seeing that': are these universal human thoughts, or could they partly reflect cultural differences?)

3. On a practical linguistic note, *how readily can a refugee express his/her feelings in spoken English?* Until we become bi-lingual, for everyone our mother-tongue remains the primary language of emotion. (This is why, however competent in a classroom, most refugees in a situation of stress/anxiety (eg with police; in a court or tribunal; in a medical emergency…) find their facility in spoken English often simply 'goes out the window'. (Unfortunately, on such occasions they may be wrongly suspected of evasion or pretence.)

4. Of course, someone's low mood might be evidence of a more serious problem: we have to accept that where a refugee shows definite symptoms of clinical depression, supportive talk alone may not be enough to meet their need. However, the 'sharing of storytelling' at the Oasis meeting is not modelling a 'group therapy' session to elicit and diagnose *clinical symptoms* of depression. We are seeing volunteers *sensitively figuring out how to elicit informal talk around a refugee's 'low mood' or 'emotions of negativity' without implying or sending the message that there's something clinically dysfunctional in feeling that way.* As volunteers, we may be wise to resist the temptation to label refugees' negative feelings by using 'medicalised' psychiatric terminology (eg 'depression' 'anxiety disorder' 'PTSD' 'mental illness'….) Put another way, when sharing someone's lived experiences, especially interculturally, we should not be too ready to co-opt such medical jargon terms: these should be reserved for people with patently clinical symptoms. In fact, deploying such terms in more informal conversations can in fact prematurely risk becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. A key message from the refugees in this 'storytelling exchange' at Oasis Cardiff is that the effects of frustration and despair can gradually self-correct, given enough time and supportive talk with volunteers and friends who can be relied on to 'be there' supportively during the low periods.

5. We can note how the other refugees at the meeting do more than simply declare empathy ('I can relate…') and how the volunteers don't just say they 'sympathise' – more importantly, they listen supportively. The refugees are not projected here simply as 'victims': we see how refugees take the initiative in giving supportive advice ('Hang on in there'). When contributed by fellow refugees through shared exchange, such informal advice help prevent well-meaning volunteers becoming unintentionally patronising.

Further discussion points arising from the meeting

Discussion prompt:

▪ What do we think speakers (both black and white) at the end of the Oasis Cardiff meeting mean by the phrase 'We need to raise our voice'?

Observation: Do they mean that meetings like these give a platform for a refugee or person seeking asylum to assert him/herself against feeling 'stuck' without work or leave to remain – ie, set up a joint initiative with volunteers through which they can establish a sense of control/agency in their lives? As a group of mainly white volunteers, what shall we *decide* to make that phrase mean… ie, how can we 'raise our voice', black and white together jointly, in exercises conducted on terms of equality of editorial power over decision-making?
Racism is a joint black and white problem in society; it requires joint black/white action to rectify it – ie action which is determined on equal power terms. This means without black people being marginalised into simply advisory or consultative roles as a way of effectively excluding them from sharing real power, or being patronised, or being subjected to assimilationist assumptions or

otherwise 'set up to fail' in merely tokenist anti-racist roles.) [Sometimes women more than men in a volunteers' group can report analogous experience/insights around how tokenism works and feels – how it operates to exclude certain groups from power, and is used to rationalise excuses for inaction to change a status quo of discrimination that is systemically entrenched.]

Discussion prompts:

- At the storytelling meeting several refugees say 'Oasis is like family to me.' Is this the ideal feedback that British volunteers can hope for from a refugee?

- The Oasis refugees appreciate that their stories are being valued by being preserved in Cardiff Museum's collection of historical recordings: this helps refugees gain a sense of 'developing a voice'. Is this something we could do for meetings in our own locality?

- How do we advise refugees to react to overt expressions of racial prejudice?

Observation: Do we have recommendations to offer on reacting to a prejudiced remark? - To confront the speaker? (How to assess whether this could be dangerous…How can each tactic be done self-protectively?) – To ignore it? - Soak it up? - Laugh it off? - Pretend we misheard? - Attempt to reason with it, querying the perpetrator's motives?

Discussion prompts:

- As volunteers supporting refugees and people seeking asylum in their interactions with the wider society, do we recognise that, while anti-black *prejudice* is usually obvious enough, *racial discrimination* involves abuse of power in forms which are hidden and more subtle than even the victims realise?

- Several times in this film we witness refugees' frustration about being stuck without work. Even after 'leave to remain' has been obtained, volunteers can help refugees to understand how things work in their new country. How can we best role-model what it means to become functionally capable *interculturally*? In particular, are we equipped to assist refugees through improvised role-play to clarify what expectations, behaviours and skills are usually needed to get a job in the UK, and/or to progress in a career? [see the recruitment follow-up exercises, pp 58 ff].

Terminology used in discussing racism and anti-racism

Discussion prompt on some commonly used terms:

- Are we aware of the debates around terminology and different views on what is acceptable?

- For example, do we understand why the term 'BAME' is thought to be undesirable by many minority ethnic people?

Observation: 'BAME' is no longer used as an official term by the present Conservative government (2021), which is keen to promote the view that there is no collective experience of racism – that everyone's experience is individual and different.

However, various objections to 'BAME' have been voiced by many refugees:

- 'It might be thought acceptable to use the term when making general social observations, but not to describe a particular individual as 'BAME'.

- 'As a collective term, 'BAME' fails to distinguish between different minority ethnic groups.'

- 'We wish our differing cultural backgrounds to be *recognised positively* – this means as much for their differences as for their commonalities/similarities.'

- 'BAME' obscures differences of culture and heritage between minority ethnic groups.

- 'I don't want to be referred and labelled to as an acronym – I'm a *person*.'

- 'BAME'? Does this mean me? As a Syrian I am not African, nor Asian, nor Caribbean.'

- Where we register a person by reference to their specific identity or 'homeland' country, should we use the term 'background' (as in eg 'of Bangladeshi background') or 'origin' (as in eg 'Kenyan origin') or 'heritage' (as in eg 'of Chinese heritage') rather than as 'BAME'?

- Should we avoid the term 'ethnic minority' (as opposed to 'minority ethnic' person)? As everyone is 'ethnic', it's wrong to imply the majority is not ethnic.

- Should we avoid using the term 'second generation immigrant'? By no stretch of imagination is a person born in the UK an *immigrant*. (Using the term for a black British person is thus exclusionary.)

- 'Asylum seeker' – as a noun used to label a person this is dehumanizing; as the Refugee Council UK recommends, it is better practice to say 'person/people seeking asylum'.

- 'Coloured': This term is considered objectionable and problematic. Under apartheid in S. Africa, it was used as a legal term to refer to people of South Asian heritage. Logically, every person is 'coloured', 'white' being technically a colour as much as brown or black. Majority British people are in terms of colour not actually 'white' but closer to 'pastel-pink' or 'purply-puce', and minority ethnic British people are not technically 'black' (most are light or dark hues of brown….). To accept white as a colour is to accept the white person's shared humanity with people of other colours. And if some people are to be called 'coloured', then fairness demands that those not called coloured should be called 'colourless' (!).

However, having said that, many black and minority ethnic people, especially in the USA (but to an extent also in the UK) nowadays use the expression 'person of colour'. 'Black' became a socially 'political' term at the time of the 1960s Civil Rights movement as a symbolic assertion against the prevailing use of the wholly negative term, 'non-white', and as a way to reclaim 'black' as a term then used to imply inferior. (Thus, 'Black is beautiful''; 'Black lives matter'; and some adopt African names to assert their pre-slavery cultural 'roots'.)

Observation: 'Black' is often used to signal solidarity - *the social sharing of a 'black' perspective* – ie, communal experience of negative treatment (based on image-making of 'minority ethnic' difference) and the need for joint action needed to confront the abuse of white majority power.

- Where we refer to a person by reference to their specific identity or 'homeland' country, should we use the term 'background' (as in eg 'Bangladeshi background') or 'origin' (as in eg 'Kenyan origin') or 'heritage' (as in eg 'Chinese heritage')?

- Should we as volunteers drop the term 'guest' for refugees, and 'the host community' as a way of referring to 'white people'?'

Observation: To call someone a 'guest' might be well-meaning in intention, but it can unfortunately be taken to imply that they are in the UK temporarily and will not only leave one day, but might be 'persuaded' to leave if thought to be 'overstaying their welcome'. And of course, refugees who are seeking to become members of the national 'family' of Britain can hardly be called 'guests'. (Such 'marginalizing' usage plays into racist exclusion.)

Further discussion issues arising from the Oasis 'storytelling' meeting:

- How far do we as a group of volunteers share consensus in how we see/understand the role of 'minority ethnic communities' in British society?

- Have we group understanding of what the 'blackness' of black Britons means to most white people?

- Have we insights/ practices/ experiences to share, of ways to assist Muslim refugees cope with the effects of Islamophobia? (cf VIDEO 3, 'Attitudes to Islam' below, p 53)

- If we are white, have we advice to share with fellow volunteers on ways to work jointly with black refugees, not just to fortify resilience in encountering racism but to campaign jointly in anti-racist action?

- Are there dangers, for white volunteers, of unwittingly acting on a patronising basis towards black refugees? Are there ways to help each other to avoid that?

- Does our group concept of 'racism', as faced by black refugees, include not only coping with overt hostility/rejection/rebuff arising from individual prejudice/bias, but also the insecurities, confusions and subtle uncertainties that arise from 'social exclusion'? (ie, structural disadvantage; 'institutional racism/discrimination'; the effects of assumed 'white privilege/dominance' embedded in British society).

VIDEO 3: 'ATTITUDES to ISLAM'

A crucial dimension of 'communicating interculturally' is the sensitive handling of differences of religious belief and observances in the context of a pluralistic, 'multi-faith' society like the UK. The documentary video 'Attitudes to Islam' offers an exercise in such sensitivity awareness: it shows British non-Muslim volunteers developing their understanding of Muslims (and allaying any fears born of ignorance or media stereotyping) by reflecting on the benefits of face-to-face inter-faith contacts. The film demonstrates what happens when non-Muslims engage in dialogue with Muslims - not in theological discussion but through human contact/ exchange.

The video illustrates how differences of religious belief and cultures become understood and valued when experienced in the everyday context of human life: work, meals, family events, hospitality, concern for health and for people with disabilities. Indeed, it may be that the video's main benefit lies less in what the British volunteers we see working in Pakistan have to say about their experiences than in the fact that we see the volunteers engaging in authentic, spontaneous dialogue with their Muslim colleagues/hosts – and in a relaxed, mutually respectful tone. A particular lesson lies in seeing how direct questioning about Islam by the non-Muslim British volunteers is warmly welcomed by their Muslim colleagues – at least when asked in an enquiring spirit. By identifying with the open-minded and open-hearted approach of the British volunteers in Pakistan, volunteers will be encouraged to find out more about Islam for themselves – and to build a consultative relationship with their local imam.

Pre-Viewing discussion quiz for volunteers

What are you expecting a training film titled 'Attitudes to Islam' to contain?

- How much contact do you have with Muslims?

- What are the main things you know about Islam and what it means to be a Muslim?

- Do you have any religious beliefs? If so, how much does this affect your perception of other religions – and of practising Muslims in particular?

- Have you probed into the cultural practices of other faiths? Was this difficult to do?

- What would you see as the most positive aspects of being a Muslim?

- How would you describe the image of Islam most people receive from the media?

- What would be your first reaction to a proposal that you go to live and work in an Islamic country such as Pakistan (or Morocco, or Indonesia)?

1. Media Images

Pause on 00.56: What impression is created by the brief opening shots of Muslims at prayer? [Note for facilitator: The same shots appear again at the end of the video. For some volunteers it can have strong training effect if you ask them to say what these 'prayer-time' images mean to them before they watch the rest of the film, and then ask them again after they've seen and discussed all the sequences.] How helpful are the points made by Tariq Modood about generalising from stereotypical images on the news media? (Eg, How representative of Islam are the ideologies underpinning Taliban rule in Afghanistan?)
[Observation: Daniel Kahneman's book 'Thinking, Fast and Slow' reports research on 'cognitive biases' including the 'availability bias' – ie, if a terrorist incident is reported in the news, people are prone to thinking terrorism is more common than it actually is. To generalise and act on such impressions is misleading and unfair concerning the great majority of Muslims, whether they live in 'Middle-East', in Indonesia (the country with largest Musim population), or here in the UK.]

2. Hospitality

Pre-viewing Pause on 9.24: What are your thoughts about hospitality in Muslim countries and in Britain? What inspires each culture's traditions of hospitality?

After-viewing pause on 16.55: How far do the thoughts and comments in that sequence compare with your expectations? How do they compare with most people's views in Britain? Do they challenge common stereotypes of Muslims?

3.   Fasting

Pre-viewing pause at 16.55: What do you understand about fasting – why do people fast?

After-viewing pause on 18.27: Were you surprised by what Farzana had to say? Would others in Britain be surprised? Note for facilitator: Fasting is a 'practice of self-sacrifice' (eg, Muslims do not smoke during fast.) Review analogous Western practices [eg fasting during Lent; no meat on Fridays.] Thinking about similarities while recognising and celebrating diversity is a positive way of developing understanding. Non-Muslim volunteers can build great rapport by joining in daytime fasting as a symbol of solidarity with refugees during Eid.

4.   Community Health

After-viewing pause on 22.28: Debbie Kramer talks about culturally different attitudes to disability she's met in the West and in Isa Nagri, the locality of Karachi where she's working.

5.   Prayer

Preview pause at 22.28: What do you think can be gained by regular prayer? (And what is an Islamic 'prayer hat')?

After-viewing pause on 25.12: What did Judith Edwards and Ruth Chuck learn from their Muslim colleagues about prayer? And especially about its relation (a) to mental health – and (b) to handling of grief and bereavement? How does what they say compare to your pre-view thoughts about what can be gained by regular prayer?

6.   Role of Women

Previewing pause at 25.12: In pairs, discuss what comes to mind when they think of 'freedom'. What is 'freedom' for you? Are there things you are free/not free to do? Are there restrictions that you have to put up with? Note for facilitator: Some may find Pauline's fellow teacher Farzana's speech a bit hard to understand without a second showing (though VSO teacher Pauline understands her completely – remember that Farzana is using English as her *third* language). There are culturally differing perspectives of freedom: what for some cultures is a restriction, for others is a pathway to freedom - especially in terms of religious traditions. Tell your group that after the viewing you will be asking: Do you think that Farzana is restricted in any way? Do you feel she would agree with you? How is Farzana' s freedom or restriction similar or different from yours? Did your group note how Farzana regards a 'Western' freedom like leaving home and family to take a job while living in a flat alone: for her this would be sheer 'punishment'. Consider the commonest stereotypes in Britain about Muslim women. What experiences have you had that reinforce or challenge those stereotypes? How far do you feel that the way women dress can be seen as a symbol of liberation or patriarchal oppression by men?

As an aside: Imagine a fellow volunteer comments 'I can't accept Muslim ways – I can't sympathise with how they regard and treat women.' How would you reply? Note: This comment considers only how Muslim *men* behave. It ignores the views and culture of Muslim women, and fails to distinguish between differing forms of Islam in different countries. (You could also note that the headteacher at

Ruth Chuck's school in Pakistan is a woman). We may need to reserve making judgments on the role of women until we know about the 'feminist' women's movements in the Islamic world [eg, through reading books by Muslim women such as 'The hidden face of Eve – women in the Arab World' by Nawal El Saadawi; 'Beyond the Veil' by Fatima Mernissi; 'Letter to Christendom' by Rana Kabbani.]

After-viewing pause on 33.09: What are the chief issues raised by this sequence? Pauline and Farzana refer to Britain and Pakistan – how do you assess their views and feelings about their own and each other's cultures? How far do you agree with Ruth Chuck's remark that 'It's difficult being a woman anywhere in the world'? Fiona McGilliray says she sees the image of Western women being distorted in Pakistan. How far would you say women are oppressed in Britain? OR How might they be seen from outside as being oppressed?

7. Dialogue and reflections on how Islam and Christianity overlap

Previewing pause at 33.09: What similarities in understanding of moral obligations or religious duties are you aware of between Islam, Christianity, and Sikhism and Rastafarianism? What are the differences and what are the similarities between the 'Abrahamic' religions Islam and Christianity – and indeed, between both and Humanism? Are there barriers to dialogue with Muslims on equal terms? If so, how best to overcome these? What is the role of a local imam in mediating community/neighbour disputes between refugees? What range of practical interpretations is placed on the Qur'an (ie, what can it be said to validate?)
After-viewing pause on 43.04: Did anything surprise you in this sequence? Were things said that would surprise many people in the UK? If so, What things? (Remind your group of the references to Mary and Jesus in the Holy Qur'an; to the religious basis of hospitality; to the role of women; to the role of prayer and daily observances – eg, cleaning hands and feet.)

8. Media Images 2

Previewing pause at 43.04: What experiences do you have of Islam and Muslims that challenge the typical image-making of the media?
After-viewing pause on 44.57: How would we summarise the distinction between a 'stereotype' of Muslims and a 'group generalisation'? (See the points on p. 15 of this booklet)
9. Being a Muslim

Previewing pause at 44.57: What for you does it mean to be a Muslim in Britain or Pakistan?
After-viewing Akram Khan Cheema's comments: How do your thoughts compare with what Akram Khan Cheeema says in describing what Islam means to him?

'TALK IT OVER': practical exercises for using English

EXERCISE 1
Imagine for a moment that you overhear a volunteer complaining: 'Some Syrian refugees thrive very well, but some remain totally reliant on us doing things for them. Instead of taking control by asking 'How can I fix this?' - or even 'Who can I ask to help me fix this?' - they ask 'Who can fix this for me?' 'It's so disheartening. Some refugees don't go out of the house; and if they do, they don't lock up behind them… They seem constantly depressed and apathetic. In talking they are so irritatingly *vague*. In fact, I sometimes wonder whether as volunteers we've actually hindered some of them – whether they'd be more independent and self-reliant now if we hadn't been here.'

Discussion prompts:
Do we recognise these complaints? Do we agree with any of them – ie, are they fair points? Or would you see such comments as 'symptoms of volunteers' compassion fatigue'?
What replies and steps of action would you recommend in response to such comments?
Could these complaints be symptoms of what happens when a refugee from a *collective culture,* in which people speak *indirectly,* find themselves confused in an *individualist* and ideologically egalitarian society like the UK, in which entrepreneurship, taking initiatives, and striking out with individual independence, are taken for granted as valued behaviours, and where talk in English is valued for its *direct* precision of expression rather than for its dramatic emotive power?

EXERCISE 2

Equipping volunteers to help refugees communicate interculturally
A crucial contribution by volunteers is the help they give to newly arrived refugees and people seeking asylum to understand how things work in their new country. How well are we equipped to *role-model* for them what it means to become functionally capable *interculturally*? In particular, How can we best support them by clarifying the expectations, behaviours and speaking skills that a refugee typically needs to get a job in the UK, and/or to progress in a career?
The purpose of this exercise is to give practice to volunteers in helping refugees with the communication involved in 'acculturating' to UK society – in three respects:

- Purely linguistic (ie, what English words and jargon terms are used in different activities)

- Intercultural linguistic scripts (the British conventions for communicating in varying situations and over certain issues – especially the expectations of process and outcome brought to verbal exchanges in the workplace)

- Dealing with negativity which might arise from encountering hostile or racist attitudes.

  (Offensive terms of course should not be expressed gratuitously in role-play).

Using *Improvised Role-play* The best way to build a sense of agency and confidence is to encourage refugees to 'rehearse' or 'practise' improvising situations in which they **do real things that matter to them** (ie not simply exchanging conversational chat).
The following exercises give volunteers an opportunity to apply in improvised role-plays, both with fellow volunteers and with refugees, the awareness and tips they have gained from examining the guides and handouts in this booklet on intercultural communication.

1. As an initial step in training volunteers to help refugees handle cultural differences, a trainer may well need to help volunteers feel at ease with *role-playing*, first with each other, then with the refugees they are supporting. Many British volunteers feel inhibited or self-conscious about role-playing. Tell them they can 'act out' the situation as themselves, *or* they can adopt a role if that feels easier. Emphasise that improvising the interactions listed below is NOT a competitive exercise in dramatic performance – it's simply the most helpful practical way of helping most refugees to discover and practise what is culturally expected in Britain, and in the light of that how best to say things in interactive situations.

2. Once the covid 'lockdown' period is over, a volunteer might usefully bring a small group of refugees together (eg five), partly because learning is better and more fun with 'study buddies' –

and, as we've noted, partly because it respects the fact that most refugees have come from collectivist, not individualistic, cultures.

3. Working jointly with refugees, a volunteer would list what things a refugee or person seeking asylum needs to know, or wants to be able to achieve, through verbal exchanges. These exchanges could include for example in

- small talk chat at supermarket checkout

- asking which bus is the right bus; requesting a driver to announce when they have arrived at their stop; how and when to use the terms 'please' and 'thank-you'.

- conversation/enquiries in a benefits office

- handling a parent/teacher meeting; asking about children's progress at school

- attending a medical appointment: getting a prescription, or asking a doctor or nurse to diagnose symptoms

- requesting police assistance

- making an emergency phone call (accident/fire)

- returning faulty goods – either to a shop or on-line

- performing as a candidate at a job interview….(see exercises below p 57 ff, and Video 4)

4. Next, help volunteers improvise together the verbal interaction (or 'linguistic script') that can be expected in those situations. The purpose is to help a refugee understand *what the other person needs to know* in order to help them effectively*; and *how to check whether they are achieving mutual understanding or not*. The volunteer would role-play the UK person in the situation; the refugee doesn't actually role-play – he/she simply *improvises* as him/herself.

You start the conversation; you stop at the first thing that goes wrong; the next person tries - and so on until a successful outcome is secured. Phrases of conversation/exchange could usefully be written down for learning and then practising in the real world. This is not to imply that there's only one 'correct way' of speaking or conducting an exchange. Communication is a 'two-way street', in which mutual meaning and rapport needs in effect to be 'negotiated' on equal power terms across cultural differences.

Assisting volunteers to support refugees in seeking work

One way that volunteers can give crucial support to refugees who have acquired fluency in basic English and are applying for jobs is to give them practice in understanding and answering the questions most commonly asked in *recruitment interviews* in Britain (whether the job is in a shop; factory; office; delivery services; hospital; school; public transport; public services….).

Following the 'cultural script' for a job interview that is familiar in their 'home' culture, it is common for refugees (and especially those from rural backgrounds) to assume that their role in a

recruitment interview in Britain is simply to set out any qualifications they have retained from school or college, and to demonstrate such general qualities as deference, polite enthusiasm, or 'determination'. But, as we can see clearly in the job interview shown in Video 4, 'Crosstalk', this assumption does not match most British employers' assumptions.

Questions typically asked in the UK (for both 'white-collar' work and for manual jobs)

Why are you applying for this job? This question seems to most refugees to be simply about their personal motivation to want a job – but in terms of the British 'cultural script' it's actually seeking evidence to assess the candidate's motivation for the *specific job applied for*. Between the lines, it is a test of how much the candidate knows about the work; and the interviewer is seeking a reason why the candidate wants *this particular job,* rather than *'any old job'*. This point is often missed by refugees from collective cultures, where displaying qualifications may well be enough to get a job, along with showing honesty (eg, 'to earn some money to support a family left at home') rather than the 'hypocrisy' of making exaggerated claims). A volunteer could usefully explain to refugees why the UK is described as a culturally 'individualist' society, where employers are keener to know of evidence of achievements and experience, and not qualifications alone.

What attracted you to this position? This question also seems to be about the candidate's likes and dislikes. But again, reading between the lines, it really means 'what can you offer the organisation?' and 'What abilities/strengths can you bring?'

Why do you want to work here? Interviewers in the UK like to *hear something positive about their organisation.* So, a volunteer could helpfully join a refugee in researching some facts about the organisation in advance. (Employers usually regard this as 'showing interest' and 'indicating good motivation'.) An 'ideal candidate' in the UK indicates that they have an idea about the aims and 'company culture/ethos' of the workplace, and how they'd set about aligning themselves with these. A volunteer could explain this cultural assumption to a refugee and advise him/she not simply to mention their own need to work (eg, to earn money to support a family left 'at home'), but rather, to express interest in the employer's need for expertise or team-working capacity.

What can you contribute in this role? Generalised persuasive claims (such as 'I'm dedicated'; 'I work hard'…) may be honest and true, but most employers in the UK find these unimpressive. They tend to regard such claims as 'general fudging that we get when the candidate has nothing more precise or relevant to say'. So, it's always better for a candidate to mention factual examples from any previous occupational experience - not forgetting to give details of any multi-lingual skills. If the candidate has no directly relevant experience to report, a volunteer might usefully explain to them the concept of 'transferable skills'.

How would you describe yourself? Include any experience of work overseas. Even if in a very different field – it can be presented as indicative of 'transferable skills'.

What would you say are your strengths and your weaknesses? A volunteer might do well to advise a refugee: Don't naively admit to 'weaknesses' just to be polite or to create an impression of 'modesty'. However, most British employers don't respond well to the sort of self-hyping that is characteristic of the USA. It is better to quote an example of praise given you by others that

recognised some personal ability or achievement.

Have you experience of adapting to *team working*? Again, it would be best for a refugee candidate to describe a past example of joining a team: or, if there are no examples, at least to state they've had no problems in relating to teams.)

Do you have experience of *customer service/focus*? (ie, include mentioning - if potentially relevant - the handling of complaints)

Experience of *managing/organising your time?* (ie showing a willingness to be flexible)

Experience of *learning from failure*? (employers like to hear evidence of successfully making improvement(s))

Experience of adapting to *repetitive work*? (ie this question is really asking, How do you cope with boredom at work?)

Experience of handling *changes at work*? (ie this question is looking for factual examples that display flexibility/adaptability?)

In essence, the best advice to give to refugee candidates who seek work in Britain is: Answer briefly, but don't just say 'Yes' to be polite – *describe a factual example* whenever you can. With British employers that's the best way to be persuasive.

<u>EXERCISE: Discussion topics to explore with small groups of refugees</u>

- Have you done paid work abroad or in the UK in the past?

- Have you done voluntary work in the UK or abroad?

- What kinds of work would you welcome doing, now or in future?

- Have you any experience of job interviews in other countries: what were these like, what were the interviewers looking for – what were the typical questions?

- Have you any experience of job interviews in the UK: what they were like, what questions were asked – were there any surprising or difficult questions?

- What do you think were the reasons for either past success or failure at interview?

- What do you expect will happen in a British job interview?

- What would be, for you, a good answer to the question 'What made you apply for this job?' And what would be a bad answer?

……

VIDEO 4: 'CROSSTALK' - training film on intercultural communication in job interviews

This documentary is the most widely used video in universities to introduce students to sociolinguistic study of intercultural communication. It shows an authentic recruitment interview in which the question 'Why are you applying for this job?' is asked by a 3-person recruitment panel in the course of an interview with a person of South Asian (Indian) background, who is seeking a 'white collar' professional post as an assistant librarian in a college. However, his reply to that question and his subsequent interactions with the panel demonstrate how cultural differences lead unwittingly to damaging misunderstandings, cross-purposes, and misperceptions of intentions, even when goodwill can be presupposed and English is being spoken entirely fluently by all parties. (Most refugees identify strongly with this candidate as someone using English as a second or third language.)

Some introductory points for using this video in training:

1. It illustrates an unwitting mismatch of the 'cultural scripts' being brought to the verbal interaction by the parties. If possible, get your viewing group to read the guide 'Communicating Interculturally' (pp 4 – 17 above) in advance of viewing 'Crosstalk'.

2. The video was first broadcast by BBC TV in 1992. Some volunteers will note (especially from the on-screen participants' hair and clothing styles!) that it now (2022) looks dated. Some quite wrongly assume that this means the film is no longer authoritative or relevant – that the case-study interviews 'wouldn't happen today'. Trainers are advised to condition their participants' expectations by presenting the film as 'a delve into the archives' or 'the BBC's earliest historically significant broadcast documentary on intercultural communication'. Then, once it has been viewed and debriefed interactively, ask your viewing group whether they consider the _content_ of the film (ie, the intercultural analysis of the on-screen interactions), as opposed to its _presentation,_ to be any less applicable in what academics call today's (2022) 'super-diverse' society than when it was made and shown by BBC TV in 1992. In fact, the sociolinguistic analysis set out in the film is no less relevant to refugees seeking work today.

3. Volunteers are likely to note how the BBC narrator sometimes refers to Mr Sandhu (the customer in the bank) as 'the Asian'. This was common usage at the time the film was made – and used to highlight that Indian-born Mr Sandhu uses a South Asian way of speaking English, in contrast to the speaking style of the native-born Englishman. But such a use of the term is nowadays unacceptable: it would be considered offensive for a few reasons (a) it uses 'the Asian' as a noun rather than saying 'the Asian person' and (b) it uses the general term 'Asian' where we'd now say 'A British person of South Asian background/ heritage' or perhaps more precisely, 'A British person of Indian background' (which he is). The reason the film refers to his national/ethnic origins at all is because it is relevant to tracing the effects of South Asian 'mother-tongue influences' (Gujerati/Hindi) on his 'Indian-English' style of speaking – ie, the film draws attention to the difference of Asian languages' intonational style from native English, rather than to nationality difference. However, as we note on p 51, acceptability of terms evolves over time.

4. Showing the 'Crosstalk' video interactively – in full or in shorter version

The full film has five main sections; it requires at least a 30 mins session to review:
- *00.15* Introduction to intercultural communication (+ Mr Aziz meets with social worker)
- *10.36* Customer (of Indian background) and desk clerk interact in a service exchange in a bank
- *13.30* Candidate Mr Sandhu in a recruitment interview for post as a college librarian
- *23.00* Professor Bhikhu Parekh: insights on the conduct of Mr Sandhu's interview
- *27.33 - 29.03* On-screen summary list of suggested good practice

Ideally, volunteers would view the whole film twice: first, to absorb its revelatory and emotive impact, and second (re-watching from *13.30* onwards), to take account of the interactive de-briefing and discussion points set out below. Alternatively, a SHORTER version of the film could show only Mr Sandhu's recruitment interview - ie, from *13.30* onwards.

The full 'Crosstalk' illustrates for volunteers and refugees the problems of intercultural communication for people who are not native-English speakers and who, even when they are well qualified and fluent in spoken English, find it bewilderingly difficult to secure a job at the recruitment interview stage. When rejected, they are uncertain whether they have met with hidden racial prejudice or discrimination. This film however, shows how such discriminatory outcomes can occur unintentionally/ unwittingly: intercultural misunderstanding as a result of linguistic mismatching of culturally different ways of speaking English.

Trainers might be interested to know that 'Crosstalk' proved to be the BBC's longest-ever continuously distributed training film: it patently met a widely felt-need for intercultural understanding. Many white employers, business managers and public sector front-line staff reported in feedback that it had inspired them to develop intercultural communication skills which significantly improved their workplace interactions with people from British Asian and other cultural minorities. There was equally positive feedback from those communities: they reported that the film had helped (at last!) to explain how apparently well-intentioned, unprejudiced and 'liberal-minded' white English people working in public services could (albeit unwittingly) in effect racially discriminate against them – not from 'unconscious bias' but as a result of linguistic misunderstanding. As Professor John Gumperz comments in the film, "communication is power": whether exercised consciously or unconsciously, power is a critical dimension of how patterns of racial discrimination are reproduced against members of minority ethnic groups.

THE FULL VERSION

00.15 [Start with Commentary: 'Crosstalk is about an everyday aspect of race relations not often covered in the media: the different ways that people from different ethnic groups use the English language…' (the film then introduces the bank customer exchanges, and introduces Mr Aziz arriving for a meeting with a social worker.)

(at *02.40*)…..(Social worker) 'Why have you come to see me, Mr Aziz?' (He replies) '….I've been made unemployed and short of money and these things.' (*02.47)*
[It's suggested that you pause here at 02.47 and explain that you are now going to cut the 4 mins interview with Mr Aziz, since it has some difficult-to-read graphics. Fast forward to restart the viewing at 07.50.)

07.50 [Restart with Commentary line: 'Afterwards, we asked if anything had been achieved…*'*

Optional interactive question:
09.24 Pause on 'I'm not sure at all.'

Input: We've seen very little of this interview, but it's clear that Mr Aziz is not happy at the outcome. We can see too, that each man blames the other for a failure of communication. From this brief initial glimpse, has anyone feeling sympathy for the social worker? (Take a vote?) Who has sympathy for Mr Aziz? (Take vote?)
Play on to listen to the explanatory commentary behind the '3-levels' on-screen graphic:

HANDOUT
9.46 For back reference to COMMENTARY of the 3-LEVELS GRAPHIC:

1st (lowest) level: 'They brought different *cultural assumptions* to the purpose of their interview and how it should be conducted. The social worker wanted to establish the facts, while Mr Aziz was looking for some recognition of his needs and his anxiety about being made redundant and so out of work in a society still liable to label 'immigrants' as 'spongers off the State'.

2nd level: 'They had culturally different *ways of structuring or ordering information or argument;* they had a different sense of what sounds logical; they had different ways of ordering, arranging and emphasising what they wanted to say.'

3rd level: 'On top of that, they had differing unconscious (ie, taken for granted) *ways of speaking* in English: how to emphasise a point or indicate a contrast by tone of voice.
It's this third level, because it is unconscious, that often makes it difficult to sort out difficulties based on the other two.'

While paused at 10.30: Check your group's comprehension of those 3-levels of analysis of why *recognising differing cultural conventions in the way we speak* is key to preventing misunderstandings across cultures.

The BANK CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCHANGE

10.36 Pick up with the Commentary: 'If we go back to the bank….
The bank interactions illustrate unconscious cultural differences in level 3 - ways of speaking English. The British Indian customer's speaking style replicates 'mother-tongue influences' in how he uses intonation when speaking English as a second or third language. This 'level 3' way of speaking – ie, differences of intonation, 'tone of voice' and placing of emphasis on words in a sentence – is a recurrent source of intercultural misunderstandings and misperceptions of meanings and intentions.

HANDOUT: INTONATION – WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT MATTERS

In culturally diverse interactions, *intonation differences* can cause a lot of problems. The term intonation is used to refer to all those musical, non-word aspects of a language: pitch, rhythm and stress, for instance. From birth, babies hear the 'music' of the talk around them and internalise its patterns long before they can produce coherent sentences. Because intonation is learned early and is held unconsciously, it's very hard to change – as a powerful 'mother tongue influence' it's common for the intonation patterns of a first language to be unwittingly replicated when speaking a second one.

The critical point is that languages have different systems of intonation. In native-English, for example, placing of stress is used to signal the most important parts of what is said. In this way, other native-English listeners know what to pay attention to and can infer the speaker's underlying attitude. In a sentence like "He didn't forget to send the email", different words can be emphasised to produce a range of sentences with quite different meanings. (Try out the effect on meaning of putting stress on each word of that email sentence in turn; go on to explore the exercises on pp 27-29 above). But some languages (which are referred to as 'syllable-timed' by linguists) do not use stress in this way. Almost every word in their sentences can be highlighted. Speakers of such languages (as we see with the customer in the bank) can bring this 'mother-tongue pattern' to their use of English, heavily stressing either too many words, or the 'wrong' words, from a native-English speakers' point of view. This can make them sound annoyed, angry or rude, even in a simple exchange. In many Asian languages, tone (not emphasis/stress) affects the meaning; a soft voice can be used to indicate seriousness or strong feeling. By contrast, in the same situation, native-English speakers generally 'cluster' their phrasing and use a higher pitch and more volume as a way of underlining key points of meaning. These aspects of the language are notoriously difficult for people using English as a second or third language to notice and learn. Equally, body language (e.g. gestures and facial expressions) plays a crucial role in signalling meaning. (Bear in mind that some studies show up to two thirds of meaning is conveyed nonverbally.)

We've already noted that the 1980s film narrator refers to Mr Sandhu as 'the Asian' – seeking to distinguish his way of speaking English from that of the native-English speaker. Make this a learning point: Did your viewing group note that that term, as used by the narrator back in the 1980-90s, is nowadays unacceptable? Are we all agreed on what is now regarded as wrong with using the term 'the Asian' in this way? What is our advice for volunteers on what to say instead – ie, can they agree on what alternative terminology would constitute acceptable/good practice today?

The JOB RECRUITMENT INTERVIEW

Mr Kurnal Singh Sandhu (the customer seen at the bank) has a degree in political science from an Indian university. Since arriving in Britain 14 years earlier, he has worked in manual jobs in

factories and as a bus conductor. Over that period he has made more than 150 job applications for white collar work. He has recently attended evening classes and gained a professional qualification in librarianship; he has sent off 50 applications seeking a library job - but this is only the second interview he has been called to attend. (Middleton College has a high proportion of minority ethnic group students and international students.)

13.13 'Here we are….' [The starting point for a SHORTER (15 MINS) viewing of 'Crosstalk']
14.30 Question 1: 'What exactly do you do in your present job?

Note to facilitator: A conventional assumption in job interviews in Britain is that all questions are related to the job applied for. This question therefore really means: 'Tell me your present duties and how these relate to the job you have applied for.'

Pause the video to ask viewers: What do you think of Mr Sandhu's reply? Do you find it impressive, or inadequate? If inadequate, is this because of the *points* he makes, or the *'odd ordering' of how he expresses these*?

Note to facilitator: It seems that Mr Sandhu is not following the conventional British speaking style. He starts by talking about some activities of his current workplace. He gives contextualising background rather than specifying his work duties. Following a typically Asian 'narrative' style, he only gets round to giving details of his current job at the *end* of his reply. As a result, for the British panel, his reply does not sound immediately relevant or sufficiently explicit.
For comparison we hear an English person's answer to the same question ('I'm responsible for cataloguing…') which begins at the point that the Asian candidate finishes. This answer is structured and spoken in a way which is heard as responsive and relevant to English listeners.

15.35 Question 2: 'What are you familiar with in the field of cataloguing and classification?'
Pause to ask: What do you think of Mr Sandhu's answer to this question?
Note: Mr Sandhu again seems 'vague' - speaking in a non-linear, imprecise way ('It depends what system the college is using…') before coming to the relevant point of his reply.

16.15 Question 3: 'Why are you applying for this particular type of job in a college? A librarian's job in a college?

16.19 *This is a crucial Pause Point – ask your group:*
- Why is this question being asked?
- How would each person in your viewing group answer that question?
- What kind of answer do you think the panel is expecting?

Once your students/trainees have stated how they would reply to those 3 questions, play on to watch Mr Sandhu's reply from 16.19: 'Well in fact I have up to now….'
16.55 (Interviewer:) ' …I see, thank you very much'.
Pause to consider:
1. What do your viewers make of Mr Sandhu's response?

2. What does the interviewer's 'Thank you very much' actually mean? (eg, Do you think Mr Sandhu has realized that it is not meant literally – that it is the interviewer's way of politely dismissing what he has considered an inadequate reply?) The discussion issue for volunteers

here is: Is this *fair feedback* by the panel for Mr Sandhu – does it help him understand that what is a good answer in 'Indian' terms sounds like a 'bad answer' in 'native English' terms? Why do the interviewers apparently ignore or rebuff his answer? What do the members of your group make of the interviewer's failure to give any feedback at all to Mr Sandhu on how his reply has been understood – or that it has been found unsatisfactory?

The problem is that the question 'Why are you applying…' was *indirectly* asked: the question implies 'What is there about this job which you are interested in professionally and which you think you could do well?' In other words, it assumes the candidate is following some strategy of careful career development. This may be quite unrealistic in relation to a migrant/refugee.

We saw that Mr Sandhu *took the question at face value*. (Indeed, he confirmed later that he was puzzled, if not insulted, by (to him) such an obvious question as 'Why do you want a job?'). But to the interviewers his lengthy explanation is perceived as irrelevant to the hidden assumptions embodied in the question: they 'switch off' and fail to acknowledge that he has raised what for him is an important topic: the racial discrimination he has faced in looking for work (an experience which is bound to affect the way he presents himself and the values and beliefs he holds). He is being judged as not really motivated to this job because he doesn't share the cultural assumption about the type of answer expected to this question; and because his answer seems to them irrelevant, the interviewers ignore his answer. Both sides are now seriously at cross-purposes – even though neither realises it. (Would these interviewers benefit from some of the skills for being one's own 'cultural mediator', as indicated in the first Guide of this Booklet, 'Communicating Interculturally'?)

17.20 Question 4: 'What attracts you to this particular librarian job? And in particular, why do you want to come to Middleton College?'
Ask viewers: What sort of answer would *you* make to this question? Then, *after they've each responded,* watch Mr Sandhu's answer. What do your group think of his reply? How would they explain what he wants to convey? Do they think he has understood how and why it creates a disastrous impression?
Note to facilitator: When Mr Sandhu says 'I'm not particularly interested in this particular job', it sounds in native English-speaking terms as if he couldn't care less about it. But this is not his intended meaning: he is simply echoing the words of the question as put, without realising how his speaking style in English sounds in terms of the 'cultural script' of the interviewers.

Some volunteers and refugees will protest that Mr Sandhu gives an honest answer ('I'm doing my best to get a job') and that these interviewers are being hypocritical and unreasonable.
Why do you think Mr Sandhu repeats his experience of discrimination?
How fair is it to conclude he would not be good in the job because he does not respond to the interviewers' implied invitation to offer positive remarks about their college and the particular scope for him in this specific post?

18.40 Question 5: 'Do you expect us to consider you as a serious applicant for this post?'
Note: This questioning has now become implicitly hostile. The interviewer clearly feels disconcerted, or 'niggled', by Mr Sandhu's increasingly Indian *manner* of speaking English. Does your viewing group think Mr Sandhu or the panel realise this? How would your volunteers' group advise a candidate like Mr Sandhu to handle such a question/situation?

We now also see a mismatch in 'cultural scripts' between candidate and panel concerning presentation of qualifications. Much of the time in a recruitment interview in India is typically given to examining and checking the veracity of qualifications (as gained at school as well as at college). So how will the fact that the panel does not examine his paper qualifications (which are in Hindi, including his primary school certificates/awards) feel to him? (He later commented to the film's producer that from this moment he knew he was going to be rejected.)

Some British volunteers and employers assume that any candidate from abroad should learn about British cultural conventions in recruitment interviews – in order to understand how to infer the indirect meanings of the questions. But unless assisted by native-English speaking volunteers, how is a migrant or refugee arriving in the UK to find these out?

By this stage, both sides are on parallel tracks rather than interacting. Mr Sandhu's rising emotional stress is reflected in his way of speaking English: his tone of voice, pitch and loudness are increasingly 'mother-tongue influenced', which leads to his coming over to the English interviewers as aggressive, and reflecting a 'difficult' personality. Overall, viewers will have noticed some key points of intercultural analysis:

- Mr Sandhu fails several times to detect that a near repetition by the interviewers of the same question is an indication that the previous answer was unsatisfactory.

- Although they give him 'second chances' to reply to some questions, he hears these as unnecessary, indeed annoying, repetition, after he's given an honest reply.

- The panel fails to appreciate and validate his experience of racial discrimination.

- How would your students/ volunteers advise Mr Sandhu to handle this interview?

- How would your students/volunteers advise the recruitment panel to handle it?

HANDOUT: *HANDLING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES*

It is a common difficulty that refugees can acquire an extensive knowledge of the words - the vocabulary - of English, but not realise that *the way they are used in spoken native-English strongly alters meanings*. Because the way we speak is largely unconscious, volunteers need training to be able to realise when things are going wrong in an intercultural exchange with a refugee; to help to identify misalignments of the 'cultural scripts' being brought into play in an interaction; to mediate any exchange in which non-native speakers of English are carrying over from their mother-tongue such differences as:

► *different grammatical structures.*

► *varying pronunciation and/or accent.*

► *intonation patterns (eg, stress within words, on particular words in sentences). [See the exercises set out in 'Communicating with speakers of Arabic']*

► *'body language' - non-verbal signals and manner.*

► *turn-taking style (eg, when to speak; how to signal wanting to come in; use of silences).*

► *either more direct or more indirect ways of talking, especially when making requests or expressing disagreement, than is customary/conventional in UK.*

► *ideas about when politeness is required, what forms of politeness are appropriate, and how these are best formulated/expressed.*

► *a 'narrative' style of answering questions, ie, outlining contextual background first and 'leading up' indirectly to the relevant point, rather than the 'linear logical' structural approach conventional in the UK, which starts with the most relevant point first, adding explanatory background only as necessary.*

► *ways of expressing emotions (ie, more/less animated) – especially when under stress or anxiety. The first language (their mother-tongue) remains the language of emotion, even when they have become relatively fluent in a second, learned language.*

► *assumptions/ expectations of the procedure or 'script' of workplace activities like job interviews, counselling, team meetings for problem-solving, job appraisals, etc.*

HANDOUT: GETTING A TURN TO SPEAK in multicultural meetings

In recruitment interviews, the exchange of talk is entirely controlled by the interviewing panel. However, in a workplace, a refugee's performance in a team will be measured, in part, by their ability to participate in team meetings successfully. Getting a turn to speak and making appropriate use of that turn are two fundamental skills they require. But rules or 'norms of behaviour' for taking a turn to speak vary across cultures. Mismatches in turn-taking style within a meeting can result in lost contributions and false evaluations. (People whose ideas and arguments are never properly heard may be regarded as less valuable.)

When everyone is sharing the same cultural background, exchanges can flow relatively smoothly. It is much harder in a culturally diverse interaction: this is because many turn-exchange signals are visual. Someone wanting to say something in a group discussion often shifts their posture or indicates with a change in facial expression that they'd like to speak. A small gesture can function as a signal to colleagues that you'd like to contribute. (The inability to make a contribution is, firstly, a personal loss with personal consequences, such as being evaluated as passive or lacking initiative – such that those unable to contribute can feel sidelined and excluded. It also affects the quality of the meeting itself - if only two or three out of a possible six or seven people contribute, this narrows a team's thinking.)

Thus, in managing meetings involving people from diverse cultural backgrounds, it's vital to note if anyone has a culturally different way of signalling when they've completed making their point. Equally, as a volunteer in a meeting, you may need to 'make space' for a refugee who is culturally unsure how to indicate in the UK that they want to come in (with the result that the 'loudmouths' dominate the agenda - often thereby blocking out important information). Bear in mind that different cultures bring different assumptions and 'cultural scripts' to interviews/ meetings. Key issues of cultural difference are:

- Should you speak at all in this meeting/interview?

- If someone should speak, who should it be?

- When you speak, how long should your turn be?

- Is there an appropriate way to open a meeting, or to introduce a topic/issue

- Should people overlap their turns – or is this unacceptable interruption?

- How to signal that you're about to finish what you want to say?

- How to indicate you'd like to come in with a question or comment?

- How best to 'give a turn' to a specific person you want to talk next?

> - If someone tries to interrupt before you've finished, what to do?
>
> - How best to structure the final turn of a topic/event? (eg, make a summary?)
>
> - And who should do this?

HANDOUT: **Idiomatic expressions - Literal vs Figurative**

If as a volunteer you are a native-speaker of English, it's advisable to avoid using idioms, at least initially, in any serious verbal exchange with refugees who are not yet fluent in English - or at least to be ready to explain what you mean by such usages. Why? Because most learners of English find it difficult to pick up the meanings of idiomatic and figurative expressions (ie, talk using 'figures of speech'). People from other cultures find them confusing, at least until they become more fully bi-lingual, because they typically hear, understand and speak English more literally than native speakers. Volunteers can greatly assist teachers of English by explaining to refugees the differences between literal and idiomatic meanings/usages.

Refugees are often bewildered by metaphors *('can of worms' 'different kettle of fish' 'window of opportunity', 'straight from the horse's mouth' 'storm in a teacup' 'bull in a china shop'*) and by figurative phrasal verbs *('kick the bucket' 'hold your horses' 'fall for it hook, line and sinker' 'smell a rat' 'get into hot/deep water' 'play ball'* (= co-operate*) 'take it in stride' 'call it a day' 'stick one's oar in' 'left us nothing to go on' 'they didn't get on' 'bark up the wrong tree')*. But it takes practice for native-English speaking volunteers to avoid slipping into such idiomatic talk – or to explain its meaning explicitly. We use it unconsciously all the time. (Did you notice that you have just read two metaphorical, figurative verbs: 'to pick up meanings' and 'slipping into talk…'?).

Native-English speech is peppered (another metaphoric term) with all sorts of idiomatic and figurative expressions – including regional expressions ('there's tidy', 'early doors'); rhetorical asides ('I suppose so'; 'so there we are'; 'you don't say'; 'who'd have thought it?'), clichéd remarks ('that's life…' *'*so it goes'), slang, jargon, mantras, nostrums, axioms, adages, colloquialisms, everyday sayings of folk wisdom, truncated (semi-complete) proverbs (eg, 'a stitch in time…too many cooks…what goes up…kill two birds…) along with huge array of figurative phrasal verbs, similes and metaphors – *few of which featured in the textbooks from which refugees learned their basic English.*

Exercise 1: Review and explain as necessary these examples of literal misunderstanding:

UK Customer making enquiry: 'I need to check our phone account because I've just lost my husband'. Offshore call centre agent: 'Where did you last see him?'

Supervisor requesting feedback on an agent's quality of customer service: 'How did you find her?' (ie, what impression did she make?). Customer: 'In Yellow Pages/online'

Customer: 'I'm calling on behalf of my late husband'.   Agent: 'Do you think he's lost his watch?'

Customer: 'That's too bad'. Agent: 'Two bad whats?'

Trainer to class: 'Anyone got a burning question?' Trainee: 'We're not allowed to smoke in here'.

UK radio interviewer: 'Do you play by ear?' Swiss Alpenhorn player 'No, by my mouth'

UK Rep: 'He wouldn't even give me the time of day!' Foreign Rep: 'Ah – 3.35 pm'

Interviewer: 'What would you say was your finest hour?' 'About 6.30 in the morning'

UK negotiator: 'I think you're in with a shout.' Negotiator from overseas raises his voice.

UK Rep: 'Rationality is not my strongest suit late at night.' Overseas Rep: 'No? Looks fine to me. Not crumpled at all"

UK Rep: 'I think we're cutting a fine line here.' Overseas rep: 'I don't think so - there's no hurry.' (mistakenly taking UK rep. to mean 'cutting it fine', ie last minute timing)

What's the problem for learners of English?

The problem with idiomatic terms and expressions is that while each constituent word has its own *literal* definition, when combined together, the words can make up an entirely different, *figurative* meaning. Put another way, 'idioms' are created when groups of words are put together to form a different combined meaning: a + b + c = d (ie, not = a,b,c). For example, the words 'up' and 'give' each have clear meanings; but putting them together as 'to give up' makes a separate, different, meaning (ie to abandon an attempt – or to 'throw in the towel', to 'coin a phrase'!).

Think what people who are still hearing English literally are likely to make of words and phrases such as: 'get cold feet…' (= become unnerved) 'get really browned off' (= fed up) 'you're pulling my leg' (= not being serious) 'be under the weather' (= ill) 'to grit one's teeth' (= take up a challenge) 'put my hands up' (= admit fault) 'that takes the biscuit/it's beyond the pale' (= wholly unacceptable) 'it's a tough call' (= hard to decide) 'it's a steal' (= a bargain) 'be up against the wall' (= facing adversity) 'have nose to the grindstone/ burn the midnight oil' (= work hard) 'throw the book at' (= punish) 'a dog's dinner' 'a red herring' (= not relevant) 'red tape' (= bureaucracy) 'cold shoulder/ send to Coventry' (= ignore) 'congrats on your new hat' (= promotion to a new post) 'don't send coals to Newcastle' 'don't tell grandmother (how) to suck eggs' 'I won't stand for it/put up with it' 'wear heart on sleeve' 'get on with it'/'get on with someone' 'see eye to eye' (= agree) 'carry the can' (= take blame) 'toe the line' (= obey); sell down the river (= betray) 'skeleton in the cupboard' 'rub up the wrong way' (= annoy) 'the elephant in the room' (= what is not being mentioned).

Even more confusing are idiomatic usages whose words add up to an almost opposite meaning: 'You don't say?' (ie, You DO say, but I find it surprising) 'That's <u>all</u> we need!' (ie, just what we do NOT need) 'Come off it/ leave it out/ do me a favour' (ie, don't exaggerate or lie to me) 'Tell me about it' (ie, I can relate to that; NOT tell me more about it) 'You can say that again' (ie, you're quite right; NOT say that again 'See you later' (ie, goodbye; NOT intending to meet again) 'As luck would have it' (ie, UNluckily) 'You amaze me!' (if said ironically/sardonically = I'm not surprised) 'Don't hold your breath' (ie, it won't happen soon) 'It's a small fortune' (ie, a large amount of money).

What are idiomatic expressions for? Why do we use them?

Native-English speakers use idioms as a way of
(a) giving lively vitality to abstract ideas (ie, 'vivifying or illuminating the abstract' [to 'coin a phrase']) – ie, to catch attention and express meaning via a lively and suggestive, even surprising, combination of images (eg 'sitting pretty' (for being in a good situation)
(b) expressing emotion/animation/enthusiasm (an English verbal way of doing what the French or Italians do by non-verbal gestures)

(c) giving dramatizing emphasis - usually by overstatement of either negative criticism (eg saying 'not a snowball's chance in hell' rather than 'it's not possible'; or 'once in a blue moon' for only occasionally) or positive approval ('it's out of this world'; 'I'm over the moon'; it's 'on the money' (= exactly right)

(d) putting ourselves across (another metaphor!) as an informal and friendly person, not at all 'pompous' 'distant' or 'starchy' (three more metaphors!).

Similes have the signal words 'as' or 'like' (*run about like a headless chicken; get on like a house on fire; tall as a beanpole*), and so create less confusion than **Metaphorical nouns** *(a bitter pill; man of straw; chip on shoulder; the horse's mouth)* and **Metaphorical phrasal verbs** which do not have such signals (to *rain cats and dogs; get cold feet; beat about the bush; spill the beans; talk turkey; eat humble pie; play it by ear; wash dirty linen in public; look the part; stand up and be counted; have a lot riding on it; cry wolf; go hell for leather; get over it; raise your game; hold on a minute*). Native-English speaking volunteers are advised to indicate initial friendliness to refugees via *non-verbal* expressiveness rather than by using idiomatic phrases. We may want to appear easy-going and informally friendly to newly arrived refugees, but by using idioms too soon we simply confuse – they are left wondering what we're on about (!). They may make a guess, but they can't be sure they've caught (!) our intended meaning. On top of that (!), in Middle-Eastern and Asian cultures people tend to *fear losing face if they reveal their uncertainty:* as a result, we may not realise that they've got the wrong end of the stick (!) – ie, haven't understood what for both of us is an important point.

EXERCISE 2: Idioms and other figurative terms – exercise with learners of English

A. Examine this assortment of metaphors and phrasal verbs. What does each mean?
B. If you were foreign-born and hearing each *literally*, what would you think it meant?
C. How you would explain the full meaning of each phrase to a learner of English?

'it takes the biscuit' 'not by a long chalk' 'money talks' 'it's on the cards' 'make the running' 'the penny's dropped' 'in fits and starts' 'no big deal' 'throw the baby out with the bathwater' 'be in the soup' 'over a barrel' 'not my cup of tea' 'a ballpark figure' 'wrong end of the stick' 'cut the mustard' 'move heaven and earth' 'decide on the hoof' 'sit on the fence' 'rain cats & dogs' 'red letter day' 'spill the beans' 'show what you're made of' 'kick myself' 'get it in the neck' 'stretch our legs' 'handed on a plate' 'I've pulled it off' 'with brass knobs on' 'you're all over the place' 'another bite at the cherry' 'find your feet' 'everything's riding on this' 'hang in there' 'I have to hand it to you – top drawer' 'a kick in the teeth' 'be given the boot' 'a one-trick pony' 'till the cows come home' 'a tall order' 'out of the blue' 'got the bit between his teeth' 'she's on the ball' 'chalk & cheese' 'a turn up for the books' 'led up the garden path' 'when push comes to shove' 'she's a…to her fingertips' 'fills the bill' 'cut your teeth' 'the lion's share' 'make no bones about it' 'the tide has	case' 'she had it in spades' 'had sour grapes' 'it doesn't add up' 'in the doghouse' 'burnt my fingers' 'take bull by the horns' 'how long's a piece of string?' 'stick to your guns' 'with flying colours' 'get to grips with /get on top of' 'let it all hang out' 'lost the plot' 'best foot forward' 'have bit between my teeth' 'make a stab at it' 'scraping the barrel' 'under a cloud' 'up to my neck' 'I got stung' 'play it by ear' 'steal the scene' 'it's a drag' 'best foot forward' 'what's the score?' 'turn over a new leaf' 'on my last legs' 'put yourself in my shoes' 'taken leave of your senses?' 'it's cool' 'it's off the wall' 'drop a clanger' 'blue sky thinking' 'give it a go' 'find my feet' 'off your rocker' 'bull in china shop' 'put it behind us' 'don't beat about the bush' 'cut off your nose to spite your face' 'right as rain' 'it was one in the eye' 'didn't cut the mustard' 'a whale of a time' 'hold your own' 'red rag to a bull' 'fly off the handle' 'eat my hat' 'the ball's in your court' 'have an axe to grind' 'tip of the iceberg' 'you're spot on' 'a close shave' 'go round the houses' 'I've cracked it' 'get cracking' 'give them enough rope…' 'hit the roof' 'nail in the coffin' 'it's one

turned' 'it takes bottle not to bottle things up' 'cross that bridge when we come to it' 'push the boat out' 'have other fish to fry' 'have a bone to pick with you' 'pointing the finger' 'butter wouldn't melt in her mouth' 'a pig's ear' 'too big for his boots' 'not up my street' 'it's a no brainer' 'my blood's boiling' 'I'm in a pickle' 'I won't sugar the pill' 'you're a wet blanket' 'gild the lily' 'right up my alley' 'don't get ahead of yourself' 'bring home the bacon' 'steal a march' 'put my foot in it' 'get your foot in the door' 'have them eating out of her palm' 'take it on the chin' 'be under the weather' 'both in the same boat' 'I take my hat off' 'between you, me and the gatepost' 'pull a rabbit out of hat/bag' 'don't get me started' 'at the coal face' 'fall on your feet' 'it strikes a chord' 'a double whammy' 'over the moon' 'outside the box' 'not rocket science' 'a flea in my ear' 'pull your socks up' 'the elephant in the room' 'take with pinch of salt' 'come out in the wash' 'have a bumpy ride' 'drive a coach and horses through it' 'an open and shut

of those days' 'put cart before the horse' 'sting in the tail' 'don't honey me with weasel words' 'play your cards right/ close to your chest' 'staring us in the face' 'water under the bridge' 'call it a day' 'I can't handle it' 'fingers crossed' 'step on it' 'don't screw it up' 'I'm on the case' 'I'm keeping tabs/ my eye on you' 'it's a pipe dream' 'stop pulling my leg' 'a different kettle of fish' 'a fly in the ointment' 'take it like a shot' 'she's a breath of fresh air' 'under the cosh' 'cat among the pigeons' 'I'm touched' 'put the boot in' 'not to put too fine a point on it' 'begs the question' 'cook my goose' 'I'm all ears' 'it ran away with me' 'it's just not me' 'playing with fire' 'it's 'groundhog day' 'left high and dry' 'Is the Pope a Catholic?' 'it rings a bell' 'dig deep' 'turn the screw' 'put your money where your mouth is' 'toe the line' 'it's on the tip of my tongue' 'hard cheese' 'there's excitement in the air' 'what's the score?' 'it cost a bomb' 'a narrow squeak' 'Heaven forbid!' 'I think I've lost the will to live' 'with a vengeance' 'a bad penny' 'the genuine article' 'Bob's your uncle!' 'Piece of cake!'

EXERCISE 3: a useful exercise for volunteers is to play a form of BBC Radio's 'Just a minute', ie, talking for 60 seconds on any subject without using any idioms; without repeating words (ie, reformulating/rephrasing instead); and without using conditionals or jargon.

PRONUNCIATION

Incidentally, if you find yourself perplexed or intimidated by the sounds of an unfamiliar language, think of refugees' problems with English! It's bad enough for foreigners to discover that quicksand can work slowly; boxing rings are square; something that isn't half bad is extremely good; that you can recite a play and play a recital; that noses can run and feet can smell; and that you fill in a form by filling it out.... But imagine what they go through when they first see certain English words and try to *pronounce* them:

"Though you're beneath a bough, you ought not to cough"
"We must polish up our Polish before we go round there"
"The bandage was wound round the wound"
"The soldier chose to desert both his team and his dessert in the desert"
"There's no time like the present, so she thought it the right moment to present the present"
"By contrast, you were being asked to compare and contrast"
"They were too close to the door to close it"
"How should I intimate that to my intimate friend?"
"I hope you don't object to this object?"

Resources:
Refugees and volunteers enjoy watching on video the recitation of an amusing verse titled 'The chaos': this illustrates in a wealth of examples the variety of English pronunciation. (To obtain a copy of this video via 'We transfer', see p 39).