



# Sociolinguistic profiles of users and providers of lay and professional interpreting services: The experiences of a recently arrived Iraqi language community in Melbourne

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on a group of sixty-six recently arrived Chaldeans and Assyrians from Iraq and the incidence of group members being users and/or providers of interpreting services in Melbourne. The distinction between ‘user’ and ‘provider’ is of interest: some informants belong to one group only; others were users who have now become providers; still others belong to neither group. The focus is therefore on lay interpreting, although contact with professional interpreters is also examined. Through a questionnaire, responses were elicited from informants in regard to the following: language acquisition and proficiency; domain use of language; intergroup relations and language use; language attitudes; and accommodation theory. Analysis reveals that providers of lay interpreting services differ from users in self-diagnosed level of proficiency, age, education level, language of thought, and media consumption. No considerable differences are recorded in relation to length of stay, degree of ‘settledness’, social networks, attitudes towards L1, language purism and self-representation. In the self-reported behaviour of providers of lay interpreting services there is evidence that they are attuned to their own and others’ spoken varieties in ways that users are not. Through empirically-collected data, this paper seeks to locate characteristics of users and lay providers that otherwise remain unexplored.

**Keywords:** lay interpreters, users of interpreting services, profiles of interpreters, sociology of interpreting, community interpreting, multilingualism, Chaldean, Assyrian, Arabic, Iraq

## 1. Introduction

Within interpreting studies, research interest is largely focused on pedagogy and aspects of technique and practice but has recently extended outwards to look at interpreting as a social phenomenon. In particular, with the emergence of community interpreting as a sub-branch of equal standing to conference or speech interpreting, attributes not only of the interpreting situation but of the interpreter him- or herself are now increasingly receiving attention. Reflecting this extension of foci, this paper examines interpreting as a socially embedded phenomenon and interpreters as actors within social and dynamic interactions together with the users of interpreting services.

This paper firstly reports on research about lay interpreting and its prevalence as a practice in a variety of situations, commonly performed by and intended for migrants in host societies. Lay interpreting foregrounds examination of the research sample of migrants from Iraq as this is a type of interpreting that the informants of this sample commonly have contact with – as users or as providers. The Iraqi migrants’ contact with professional interpreters is examined statistically and in comparison with lay interpreting to contextualise the place of lay interpreting within interpreting studies research.

The research sample itself consists of sixty-six members of Melbourne’s 5,000 strong Chaldean and Assyrian communities and the paper’s focus is on informants’ use of interpreting services (both professional and lay) and informants’ provision of services as lay interpreters. Four groups of informants are distinguished:

- 1) Those who have been only recipients of interpreting services;
- 2) Those who have once been recipients and who have also become providers of interpreting services;
- 3) Those who have been only providers of interpreting services;
- 4) Those who have neither used nor provided interpreting services.

These four groups represent not only the complementary categories of users (Group 1) and providers (Group 3), but also fluid, ‘in-between’ categories of ‘once users, now providers’ (Group 2) and those who claim to have never used or provided interpreting services, the ‘neither/nor’ category (Group 4). After informants’ experiences with interpreting (and translation) services are presented, each group is analysed according to a variety of features: demographic, sociolinguistic, socio-psychological and attitudinal. These features are chosen as they are important criteria or relevant variables in analyses of language acquisition and proficiency (cf. Ellis, 1993), the sociology of language through domain-specific analysis (Fishman, 1989), intergroup relations and language use within social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) and accommodation theory (Giles, 1973).

Through the application of these features, this paper seeks to provide detailed profiles of users and lay providers of interpreting services with relevant information about these groups that goes beyond the anecdotal and unsystematically collected information that otherwise abounds. This information is of interest to the following: public and private sector Translation and Interpreting (hereafter: T&I) providers and policy-makers; T&I trainers who commonly teach students who have been lay interpreters themselves; and T&I and sociolinguistic researchers who are interested in the occurrence of interpreting as an unremarkable, unmarked phenomenon in bi- or multilingual communities.

## **2. Literature review and background**

Interest in community interpreting has led to greater attention being devoted to group norms and social features within the discipline of interpreting studies. Discussion on cross-cultural interaction as a feature of interpreting now focuses not only on the comparative discourse norms of Chinese scientists, Spanish diplomats and Canadian businesspeople and but also those of Indian-Fijian guest-workers, Vietnamese-Australian public servants and Kosovo-Albanian asylum seekers, to name some examples. That paid and trained interpreters in many countries now perform much if not most of their work in hospitals, legal offices, courts and public service settings means that community interpreting is a recognisably important and widespread activity.

I hesitate to use the terms ‘community interpreting’ and ‘lay or untrained interpreting’ in the same breath because the former certainly does not imply the latter. But the fact is that the latter generally occurs in ‘community’ situations (cf. Ozolins, 2000, p.23; Angelelli, 2004, p.21). At the same time, many practitioners who are now trained community interpreters were, in the course of their lives, once ‘pressed into service’ as child- or untrained interpreters. The discipline has now outgrown the need to ignore lay interpreting<sup>1</sup> and can now see it as a practice that is related to trained, professional interpreting, although more risk-laden and in almost all ways less desirable.

One can also look at lay interpreting beyond the parameters of an immigrant language community and as a practice that characterises bilinguals in general. Harris and Sherwood (1978) contend that “translating is coextensive with bilingualism”, i.e. that bilinguals are, by implication,

‘translators’ in the lay, not professional, sense and that all bi- and multilinguals have, at some time in their lives, interpreted for others or engaged in self-directed translation activities (cf. Müller, 1989). As a majority of the world’s population is bi- or multilingual, by extension, ‘lay interpreting’ can make not only the claim for itself that it is the most widespread form of interpreting, it can also be viewed as a feature of the human condition.

This paper has as its focus a multilingual immigrant community in Melbourne and its use and provision of interpreting services. Australia is considered by many to be exemplary in the provision of paid and accredited interpreters (whether trained or untrained) for non-English-speaking residents in public-service and other situations (cf. Chesher, 1997). As a result, informants of the sample that is the focus of this study are likely to have been the recipients of paid interpreting services, most often in Arabic, but also in Chaldean and/or Assyrian, and this is confirmed by the numbers of informants who report this (twenty of the twenty-one informants from Group 1 and fifteen of the seventeen informants from Group 2). But many informants’ interpreting needs are not and cannot always be met by professional interpreters. As a result, family members, friends or others frequently perform interpreting duties for them. This paper does not seek to advocate or popularise lay interpreting as a practice equivalent or comparable to trained and professional interpreting, but to present information on its incidence and on those who use and perform it.

Almost all professional interpreters, regardless of their mode and place of work, know of unfortunate events that have occurred due to the actions of a lay interpreter. One well documented example is provided by Pöchhacker and Kadric (1999) who locate the undesirable consequences of a hospital cleaner serving as a lay interpreter. Reflecting the gravity of the consequences of misinterpretation in life-threatening situations, a large number of cautions about the use of unqualified interpreters have emanated from the medical field, e.g. Phelan and Parkman (1995), Cambridge (1999), Chen (2006), Searight and Searight (2009). These studies either specify that low language skills are the attribute that is most lacking or identify a general ‘lack of professionalism’ amongst lay interpreters.

In descriptions of lay interpreters, language skills, whether self-diagnosed or diagnosed by others, are instrumental in bilinguals taking on this role. For example, in the situation of multilingual concentration camps, Tryuk (2010) concludes that language skills alone, not nationality or other criteria, destined SS soldiers or camp prisoners to nominate themselves for interpreting tasks. Fluency in the L2 appears to be the main criterion that motivated lay interpreters to volunteer their services in a study by Karlik (2010). As well as language skills, Berk-Seligson’s (2005) study of untrained Spanish-Quichua legal interpreters reveals that the educational level, moral character and perceived impartiality are key criteria in the selection of lay interpreters by others, usually judges.

Within interpreting studies, lay interpreters are sometimes examined as a contrast control group to trained interpreters for particular production skills (Dubslaff & Martinsen, 2005) or as potential or current trainees of interpreting courses (Mikkelsen & Mintz, 1997; Niska, 2005; Valero Garcés, 2003; Angelelli, 2010). Some accounts focus on social engagement and skill enhancement amongst young bilinguals, foregrounding the emancipatory and activist nature of lay interpreting (e.g. Michael & Cocchini, 1997; Valdés, 2003) with less attention paid to actual interpreting performance.

There are very few studies which examine lay interpreters from their own perspective or that of the people that rely on them. Hale’s studies which examine practitioners and questions of identity (2005), ethics, questions of practice (2007), role-relationship (2007, 2008) and job satisfaction (2011) are

based mostly, but not only, on responses from trained and accredited interpreters. Amongst those who are untrained interpreters, Hale (2007, pp.130-135) finds that some have negative attitudes towards particular formal requirements, such as ethical codes etc. Elsewhere, Hale (2007, p.164) describes anecdotal experiences reported from trainee interpreters about their own lack of knowledge and naivety when reflecting on their performance as ad-hoc, lay interpreters for other family members. What is unmistakable in Hale's research is the concern that trained interpreters express about their conditions and treatment, which, they argue, have been shaped by organisational and personal attitudes to interpreting – from highly supportive and prioritising to makeshift and marginalising. Hale (2004, 2007) reports that many negative perceptions can be attributed to the unprofessional behaviour of lay interpreters that brings down the general standing of the profession. Lay interpreters are usually well-meaning but become complicit to a system which relies on them to perform tasks beyond their capabilities. The introduction of interpreting training courses and the sensitising of key occupational groups that work with interpreters has led, happily, to a change in interpreters' self-perceptions and the way they believe others perceive and treat them. Hale (2011) contrasts recent positive responses elicited from practitioners who report an increasing level of status and respect displayed. This contrasts with an older study (Hale & Luzardo, 1997) which reported low-status attitudes towards interpreters and views of them as unskilled helpers and potentially partial compatriots.

There are few studies which quantify and document institutions' use of trained vs. untrained interpreters. In one study to do this, Bischoff and Loutan (2004) found that in 194 Swiss health service settings, untrained interpreters (patients' relatives, other health professionals, ancillary staff) were used far more often than paid interpreters who, depending on the language, were employed in only 5% to 17% of interpreted interactions.

Lay interpreters need not only come from inside the family. Informal extra-family networks or formally organised associations can provide interpreting services. Émigré or diaspora associations arise for a variety of reasons, not least due to the need for interpreting and translation services. These are frequently understood as axiomatic to their creation and maintenance (Schrover & Vermeulen, 2005) and are usually so ambient that they are unremarkable to both insiders and outsiders, rarely attracting formal study. In a large scale study of 317 immigrant 'community-based organisations' in New York City, Cordero-Guzmán (2005, p.901) reports that 72% provide interpreting and translation services, whether through volunteers or paid (and referred) professionals. In some communities, community leadership is synonymous with the provision of T&I services and vice versa.

### **3. Chaldeans and Assyrians: Their linguistic repertoires and their T&I needs**

The situation of the informants that make up this sample is also an immigrant one. This sample was overwhelmingly bi- or multilingual in their homeland, Iraq, and lay interpreting was for many already a common and unremarkable practice. Chaldeans and Assyrians are minority groups in Iraq who differ ethnically, religiously and linguistically from the Arab and Kurdish populations. They see themselves as custodians of an ancient culture which pre-dates the arrival of Arabs in ancient Mesopotamia. In regard to designations used in this paper about and by the informants, the terms 'Chaldean' and 'Assyrian' are used here as terms that refer to the ethnicity and to the name of the language of the informants. These are terms that the informants themselves use to refer to their ethnicity and language. The

author, in line with ethnographic research, adopts terms that the target groups themselves use. Some informants view Chaldeans and Assyrians as ‘being the same people’ or ‘belonging to the same people’. Others see both groups as closely related but still distinct. This paper views both groups as closely related, distinguished chiefly through religious affiliations: most Chaldeans are Eastern-rite Catholics while most Assyrians belong either to the Assyrian Church of the East or the Syriac Orthodox Church.

By the early 1990s, the percentage of Christians had fallen to about 5% of Iraq’s population: approx. 650,000 Chaldeans and 350,000 Assyrians (O’Mahony, 2004). While Chaldeans and Assyrians account for only 5% of the Iraqi population, they make up nearly 40% of the Iraq-born population in Australia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2007).

The languages of the informants, Chaldean and Assyrian, are Semitic languages, distantly related to Arabic, written with a distinct alphabet called ‘Madinkhaya’. Geographical isolation and socio-religious separation allowed Chaldeans and Assyrians to maintain their languages in Iraq. However, the socio-political dominance of Arabic in Iraq and the Arabisation policies of the Ba’ath party from the 1970s onwards have led to language shift among some Chaldeans to Arabic. Language shift to Arabic is also recorded amongst other Chaldeans and Assyrians in an émigré situation (Sengstock, 2005). A consequence of Iraq’s Arabisation policies and the forced closing of ethnic and parochial Chaldean and Assyrian schools is the lack of literacy in these languages amongst all but three informants of the sample. When requiring or providing translation services, Chaldeans and Assyrians rely on Arabic as the source or target language. Notwithstanding the dominance of Arabic in Iraq and the standing of this language as a major world language and prominent community language in Australia, in Melbourne (and Sydney) there is now a small number of formally recognised and/or accredited interpreters and translators in Chaldean and Assyrian that service these communities, as well as Arabic practitioners.

#### **4. Focus of paper**

The focus of this paper is the profiles of members of a recently arrived immigrant community in Melbourne that seek and/or provide interpreting services. As stated, the sample of sixty-six informants is broken up into four groups. Profiles of the sixty-six informants are compiled on the basis of analysis for the following features:

- 1) Language level;
- 2) Age;
- 3) Educational level and occupation;
- 4) Length of residence and intention to stay in the host society;
- 5) Language choice in the home/family/personal domains;
- 6) Language of social networks;
- 7) Language of written texts and media;
- 8) Linguistic ‘awareness’;
- 9) Self-representation;
- 10) Accommodation to other speech varieties.

The first feature above is axiomatic to the perceived need for and the perceived ability to be able to provide interpreting services. The second, third and fourth features seek to show whether age, educational level, occupation and length of residence and future plans about place of residence co-occur with linguistic needs and abilities and informants’ sense of ‘settledness’. A person’s sense of permanency shapes their motivation to acquire the new host

society language but also to cultivate and invest in L1 social and support structures. The fifth and sixth features seek to document, independently of informants' self-assessment of their linguistic skills, which language/s they are using to perform home, family and personal tasks and to interact with those close to them. Informants' responses about these choices provide evidence for acquisition of and proficiency level in another language if previously-used languages are being abandoned. Feature seven records informants' literacy habits with reference to Arabic and/or English as preferred codes as only very few informants have literacy in Chaldean or Assyrian. Feature eight seeks to uncover informants' level of awareness of language learning and language maintenance strategies, affective attitudes towards language varieties and normative views about language 'mixing'. Feature nine focuses on self-representation through forms of national self-description and choice of name. The last feature, linguistic accommodation, relates to informants' reported behaviour of converging to others' speech varieties; being attuned to others' varieties is a key attribute of interpreting and informants' responses that are interpretable within Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991). Evidence of accommodation as a socio-psychologically motivated discourse-pragmatic feature is of interest to see whether this is represented amongst those who provide lay services.

The paper therefore seeks to extend the body of literature on the users and providers of interpreting services, in line with recent research on the professional identity of practising translators and interpreters (Setton & Liangling, 2009; Angelelli, 2011; Baibikov, 2010; Badalotti, 2010; and Morris, 2010).

## 5. Methodology

Criteria for inclusion of possible informants in this study are: Iraqi-born; non-exclusive identification as Chaldean or Assyrian. The author is not an in-group member but has had substantial, on-going contact with Chaldeans and Assyrians. The author's contact with them was initially as an interpreter, working concurrently with other Assyrian and Arabic language interpreters, and later as a lecturer<sup>2</sup>. Through four of these former students, the author was able to gain contact with eighteen informants.

The remaining forty-eight of the sixty-six informants were contacted by a research assistant, a Chaldean in-group member, multilingual social worker with close ties to Melbourne's Assyrian community as well<sup>3</sup>. Data was elicited from informants by way of a written, paper-copy questionnaire. For many informants, the questionnaire was filled out for them by the research assistant. As Arabic is the language in which informants have the strongest literacy skills, this language was chosen for the questionnaire so that informants could also fill it out independently. Other studies on Chaldeans and Assyrians in the diaspora have also employed written questionnaires in Arabic (eg. Sengstock, 2005). Informants were free not to answer questions: some questions remained unanswered by many informants and these are recorded under the 'no response' category in tables. Unless otherwise stated, percentages rather than whole numbers are used to quantitatively show informants' responses.

Data was collected from April to July 2010. The average age of informants was forty (youngest sixteen; oldest seventy-two) and the average length of residence in Melbourne was eight years. A large number (twenty-seven), were born in Baghdad, while twenty-nine stated that they grew up there. A disproportionate number of informants are former members of

Baghdad's Chaldean and Assyrian communities that have recently decreased greatly in number (O'Mahony, 2004).

Written questionnaires are a common data-gathering tool in T&I and minority-language use research and a written questionnaire was the most suitable means of eliciting a large number of responses from a medium-sized sample of informants such as this one. The number of questions and the quantitative focus of the study meant that unfortunately there was little scope for the recording of longer responses or digressions from informants. The size of the sample, sixty-six, is just over 1% of the entire potential target group (of Chaldeans and Assyrians in Melbourne) of 5,000. In statistical terms this is a relatively high ratio but the sample is not large enough to make claims of representativeness for the whole target group or for other recently-arrived migrants in Melbourne or elsewhere.

## 6. Description of informants

The sample of sixty-six Iraqi-born informants consists of speakers who identify as Chaldeans or Assyrians. Fifty-seven informants refer to their first language as Chaldean, four nominate Assyrian, while five informants list Arabic as their first language. The L1 Arabic-speakers are Chaldeans who shifted to Arabic as their chronologically first-learned and dominant language (in Iraq) and who have low-level, passive-skill proficiency in Chaldean. Except for one informant, all L1 Chaldean- and Assyrian-speakers have proficiency in Arabic. In the tables below, the languages 'Chaldean' and 'Assyrian' are commonly grouped together as 'Chal/Assr'. Table 1 shows informants' responses as (non-)users and/or (non-)providers of translation and interpreting services. The abbreviated forms in single quotation marks listed in each of the columns of Table 1 are used in Table 2 and all subsequent tables.

Group	Users of T&I only 'Users only'	Users and providers of T&I 'Users & Providers'	Providers of T&I 'Providers only'	Neither users nor providers of T&I 'Neither/Nor'
No.	21	17	14	14
%	32	26	21	21

Table 1: Number of informants who report being users and/or providers of T&I services.

Four groups emerge which are of comparable size. The single largest group consists of informants who claim to be users only of interpreting services. The second group consists of those who have been users and who have become providers of interpreting services which is the second largest group. Fourteen informants (21%) claim to be providers of interpreting services while a similar number state that they have neither used nor provided these services. Data was not collected on the contexts or settings that lay interpreting services were provided or used. Groups 1 and 3 contrast in experiences and the presentation and interpretation of responses below seeks to document if the other features also contrast strongly. Group 2 appears to occupy a mid-point between Groups 1 and 3. Group 4 is of interest to see how the 'non-involved' informants share features with the other groups.

Features of each group are presented descriptively and comparatively in sections 7.1 to 7.10 below. Collated findings are presented in sections 7.11.

In sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2 below, the different experiences of users and providers are presented separately, while contact with translations and translation services for all informants is presented in section 6.1.3.

## **6.1 Experiences of use and provision of interpreting and translation services.**

### *6.1.1 Users groups*

Table 1 above shows the numbers and percentages for each group of informants. The ‘users group’ (‘users only’ and ‘users & providers’) make up forty-one (58%) of the sample. Data was collected to establish who performed interpreting (intermittently and/or regularly) for these groups and which language/s were employed. Multiple responses were encouraged and Table 2 below records who these providers are.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Total %
Family member or friend - Chal/Assr	43	53	<b>46</b>
Family member or friend – Arabic	19	6	<b>13</b>
Arabic interpreter	53	35	<b>44</b>
Chaldean interpreter	24	17	<b>21</b>
Assyrian interpreter	24	35	<b>29</b>
Customer service assistant – Arabic	5	0	<b>3</b>

Table 2: User groups and their providers

Table 2 above shows that both lay and professional services are widely used. Lay practitioners are almost always family members, usually employing Chaldean or Assyrian, or friends who interpret sometimes in Chaldean or Assyrian, sometimes in Arabic. Arabic is preferred by some younger informants in contexts such as health or educational contexts in which they report higher dominance. Table 2 above reveals contact with any types of interpreters but does not gauge the volume of interpreting performed by lay versus professional interpreters. Anecdotally, many informants report that particular family members provide(d) interpreting services on a regular basis while use of professional interpreters depended largely on the other party organising and paying for their employment. It can be assumed that a much larger volume of interpreting is performed by lay family members and friends, but almost all users have also had the experience of professional interpreting services.

There are sharp differences in the availability of interpreters for Chaldean, Assyrian and Arabic. Availability for the former two languages is restricted: the national accreditation authority’s directory of practitioners reveals one Chaldean, three Assyrian and over 30 Arabic interpreters in Melbourne (NAATI, n.d.). Nonetheless, many social service and health outlets in the outer northern area of Melbourne where all informants live regularly provide interpreting services in all three languages. When seeking interpreting services, on average 57% of both groups say that they ask for Chaldean, 55% for Arabic and 21% for Assyrian (multiple responses were allowed). When all three languages are available, informants from both groups responded with the following preferences: Chaldean (51%); Arabic (23%); Assyrian (5%); Don’t care (21%).

### 6.1.2 Providers groups

The providers of interpreting services were asked about interlocutors for whom they interpreted and languages used. No informant had passed through any formal training in interpreting or translation. All interlocutors for whom they had interpreted were family members, friends, acquaintances and neighbours; none had interpreted for strangers in a paid or unpaid situation beyond momentary impromptu interactions. Table 3 below lists the language combinations for which the two provider groups interpreted. Multiple responses were allowed.

	Users & providers	Providers only	<b>Total %</b>
English-Chaldean	77	64	<b>70</b>
English-Arabic	47	72	<b>58</b>
English-Assyrian	17	0	<b>10</b>
Chaldean-Arabic	24	7	<b>16</b>
Chaldean-Assyrian	17	0	<b>10</b>

Table 3: Languages of interpretation used by providers

All providers interpret in more than one language combination, usually English-Chaldean and English-Arabic. Some also report interpreting between Chaldean and Arabic which is unusual as almost all Chaldeans have proficiency in Arabic. Interpreting practices generally reflect the needs and preferred languages of family members and friends. The higher reporting of English-Arabic interpreting amongst the providers only indicates that this group also performs interpreting for non-family members and other Arabic-speakers. Chaldean-Arabic and Chaldean-Assyrian interpreting is unexpected and may relate to interpreting practices of some informants in Iraq.

### 6.1.3 Translation services

Use of translation services, usually referring to the translation of personal documents from Arabic into English or translated materials into Arabic available in a variety of public service settings, is also examined. No informant was a provider of translation services (apart from impromptu sight translation tasks which are sub-categorised as interpreting). Table 4 below records each group's responses, specifying the participating languages.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither / Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Arabic	86	88	64	29	<b>61</b>
Chaldean	19	17	7	7	<b>14</b>
Assyrian	0	6	7	7	<b>5</b>
Never needed translations	14	6	15	36	<b>14</b>
No response	14	0	7	21	<b>10</b>

Table 4: Use of translation services and languages

Over three-quarters of informants have used translation services. Translation into English occurs almost invariably from Arabic, the language in which informants' personal and other documents are written. Translation from English also occurs mostly into Arabic. The reason for this is the discrepancy in informants' literacy skills according to language: 91% of informants report 'good' or 'excellent' reading skills in Arabic; only 8% report literacy skills in Chaldean; only 5% report literacy skills in Assyrian. The percentage of informants who report using translation services in Chaldean and/or Assyrian is surprisingly high. This may reflect informants' awareness, if not use, of local community legal and health information now translated into Chaldean and Assyrian. There is some variation in the use of translation services. The neither/nor group for interpreting services also makes little use of translation

services in comparison with the other groups. The users of interpreting studies are also the highest users of translation services. A correlation exists between use and non-use of both services. Translation, as a practice and as a service, remains otherwise undiscussed in this article which focuses on interpreting services only.

## 7. Results

### 7.1 Self-diagnosed language level

Language level is an obvious and axiomatic feature of use and provision of interpreting services. Users usually self-diagnose their own language level as insufficient to allow them to interact in communicative situations or their level is diagnosed by others so as to justify provision of interpreting services. Lay providers also self-diagnose their own abilities while trained and accredited interpreters can point to formal and recognised measures of proficiency. Table 5 below presents informants' self-diagnoses for the active macro-skill of speaking in English.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Excellent	0	6	29	14	<b>11</b>
Good	29	41	57	65	<b>45</b>
Fair	38	26	14	21	<b>29</b>
Poor	24	17	0	0	<b>12</b>
Non-existent	9	0	0	0	<b>3</b>

Table 5: Informants' self-descriptions of English spoken proficiency

All informants who perform lay interpreting rate their English spoken skills more highly than the informants who only use these services. This finding is to be expected. Those who have both used and provided interpreting services rate their skills at a lower level than those who are providers only and those who neither use nor provide. Data was elicited on the other three macro-skills: listening, reading and writing. The above spread of responses in relation to speaking is congruent to responses given about informants' other macro-skills.

Data on informants' self-diagnosis of their Chaldean, Assyrian and Arabic proficiency is not presented here in detailed form due to the similarity of responses. There is no major difference in the self-diagnosed level of L1 proficiency amongst providers compared to users. All informants consider themselves native speakers of Chaldean, Assyrian and/or Arabic respectively.

Self-diagnosis of language level is commonly influenced through formal instruction received in the language. As this immigrant community is of recent vintage, instruction in English received in Iraq is likely to co-determine informants' proficiency levels, as well as instruction received after arrival in Australia. Table 3 below shows that two-thirds of the providers only of interpreting services had received such instruction while none of the users reported previous instruction in English. Prior contact with English appears to be a strong factor in locating the possibility of being a provider of interpreting services.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Yes	0	47	64	57	<b>37</b>
No	100	53	36	43	<b>63</b>

Table 6: Formal instruction in English prior to arrival in Australia

## 7.2 Age

Age and period of and length of contact with a language are important, if not predictive factors in proficiency level. Age is a strong but not absolute determiner of linguistic attainment. The ‘critical period hypothesis’, i.e. the hypothesis that neurophysiologic changes hinder ‘native-like’ acquisition of a language after puberty, has recently been scaled back by some researchers who posit that there are no absolute, neurological, physiological or other constraints to ‘native-like’ acquisition of a language at any point in life and that causes for ‘non-native-like’ output are to be found in speakers’ own environmental and socio-psychological circumstances (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1995). This contention is rejected by others (e.g. Long, 2005). In any case, Dewaele (2007) locates both similarities and differences between younger and older learners based on self-reported experiences and diagnoses. Length of contact has an incremental and positive effect on acquisition (Ellis, 1993, pp.66-68), as long as quality and quantity of input is constant. Age and period of contact remain key factors in speakers’ self-assessments of language ability. Table 7 below shows the average age and other demographic data for each of the four groups:

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Average age	46	37	34	40	<b>40</b>
Average age on arrival in Australia	39	29	27	31	<b>32</b>
Average length of stay in Australia	8	8	7	9	<b>8</b>

Table 7: Average age, age on arrival and length of stay in Australia.

The average age of informants is forty years old. The oldest informant is seventy-two, the youngest thirteen. Age at arrival ranges from seventy-one to eight while the average age on arrival is thirty-two years old. Length of stay ranges from six months to twenty-nine years with an average of eight years. Interestingly, there is little difference between the four groups in their average length of stay in Australia. There are differences in average ages across the groups. The users only group has the oldest average age, forty-six, and the oldest average age at time of arrival, thirty-nine. All other groups are younger. The youngest average group is the providers only group. The users and providers and the neither/nor groups differ little in this demographic feature as well.

## 7.3 Educational level and occupation

Education level facilitates the development of a number of skills and abilities. When conducting entrance tests for basic community interpreter training in four Australian states for approximately seventy lay interpreters with skills in ‘new and emerging’ languages (from east Africa, central Africa, central Asia and Burma), I was struck by the high level of education that many entrants had attained. A high level of education appeared to be a factor which enabled many individuals to take an active role in the welfare and settlement needs of co-nationals, and with this, voluntary lay interpreting services. In a sample of sixty-five professional translators and interpreters, Badalotti (2010) records that all practitioners had at least an undergraduate degree. Table 8 below sets out the number of informants who completed twelve years of education.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Completed 12 years education	25	56	77	51	<b>49</b>

Table 8: Percentage of informants who completed 12 years of education

Iraq's school system is based on six years of primary school and six years of secondary school. Until the 1990s, Iraq enjoyed high levels of participation in formal education and the highest level of literacy (80%) of any Middle Eastern country (De Santisteban, 2005). Statistics above relate to informants who have completed twelve years of school in Iraq and/or Australia. The vast majority who completed secondary school did so in Iraq. The statistics show marked differences of roughly 25% in educational levels between all groups. Table 9 below shows informants' responses in regard to occupational engagement and skill level.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Skilled/professional in Iraq	0	12	12	14	<b>9</b>
Semi-skilled/unskilled in Iraq	45	23	41	18	<b>32</b>
Skilled/professional in Australia	0	8	14	0	<b>6</b>
Semi-skilled/unskilled in Australia	13	22	25	17	<b>18</b>
Not in labour market in Aust, N/A	87	70	61	83	<b>76</b>

Table 9: Occupational engagement and skill level in Iraq and Australia

Table 9 above shows that few informants were employed in professional or skilled occupations in Iraq or Australia – this is partly due to lower rates of female participation in education and the labour force and some informants who left Iraq in young adulthood and older informants of retirement age. Occupational engagement and higher skill level correlate with those informants who provide interpreting services. Those who are users tend to have lower levels of occupational engagement (e.g. due to unemployment, or due to disability, sickness, aged pension or being a carer). Overall, the sample contains many informants who are not in the labour market, i.e. on unemployment or sickness benefits, retired, in apprenticeships, at university etc. This is not unusual for many recent migrants to a new host society such as Australia (Waxman, 2001).

#### **7.4 Place of residence of family members and intention to stay in the host society**

Nuclear family members and other members of an immigrant's wider family frequently play an important role in settlement and acclimatisation. A large number of other family members in the new society can facilitate the replication of family and other social networks from the country of emigration. The choice of language remains as it was in the original homeland for communication between older speakers and often also for younger speakers (Clyne, 2003). At the same time, a large number of other family members also in the new host society is likely to lead to a greater sense of permanency amongst migrants. In the short term this leads to a realisation that the language of this new home is important, as opposed to the languages of transit countries such as Turkey or Greece, which were not

learnt due to the Iraqi emigrants' belief that their stay in these countries was temporary. Long term, this sense of permanency is conducive to language shift to English (Clyne 2003, pp.23-42). Table 10 below shows the place of residence of informants' other family members.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
All family members in Australia	34	47	36	14	<b>33</b>
Most family members in Australia	47	12	50	72	<b>44</b>
Some in Australia, some elsewhere	14	41	14	14	<b>18</b>
Most family members in Iraq	5	0	0	2	<b>5</b>
All family members in Iraq	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>

Table 10: Place of residence of other family members

Associated with the place of residence of other family members is the desire that informants express as to their future place of residence. Table 11 below sets out informants' responses about living in Australia, Iraq or elsewhere.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Australia only	5	59	72	21	<b>36</b>
Australia with an occasional visit to Iraq	57	35	7	51	<b>39</b>
Australia with frequent visits to Iraq	5	0	0	0	<b>2</b>
Iraq / Elsewhere	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Undecided	24	6	21	21	<b>18</b>
No response	9	0	0	7	<b>5</b>

Table 11: Future intended place of residence

Tables 10 and 11 above indicate that most other members of informants' families also live in Melbourne or other parts of Australia and that over three-quarters see their future in Australia. The large-scale evacuation or departure of Chaldeans and Assyrians since the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 succeeded a steady and high rate of Chaldean and Assyrian emigration from Iraq since the late 1970s. The large number of informants who report all or most of their family members in Australia indicates widespread family- and chain-migration of informants' families similar to that recorded amongst Chaldeans and Assyrians in North America (Sengstock, 2005). There is little difference between the individual groups in regard to place of residence of other family members with between 59% and 86% of informants stating that most or all of them live in Australia. Place of residence of other family members therefore has little influence on informants' using or providing services – in many cases however, the presence of close relatives is the facilitating factor in being able to use and needing to provide lay interpreting services.

There are some differences between the groups in regard to future place of residence: the providers of interpreter services are much more likely to nominate that they plan to live in Australia only in their future years, indicative of a strong sense of settlement and/or knowledge that return is not feasible or desirable. The user only group and the neither/nor group also show general preferences for further residence in Australia but with the

possibility of an occasional visit to Iraq. No one states that return to Iraq is a desired possibility but many are undecided.

### 7.5 Language choice in the home/family and personal domains

Language choice in the home domain refers to the language spoken by informants at home with preceding-, same- and succeeding-generation relatives. The language that informants used with older or same-age relatives was invariably their first language, i.e. Chaldean, Assyrian or Arabic. With the next generation, many of whom have grown up in Australia, informants may be shifting to English, often due to that language becoming the dominant language of some younger children. A comprehensive presentation of data on language shift/maintenance within the family is beyond the scope of this paper. However, data from a variety of multilingual scenarios, both indigenous (e.g. Young, 1988; Kamwangamalu, 2003) and immigrant (Pütz, 1991; Wei, 1994) show that language shift in the family strongly correlates with self-estimations of high proficiency in the newly adopted language. Overall, Iraqi-born Australians record low levels of language shift in the family: only 3.9% of Iraqi-born Australians report English as the ‘language spoken at home’ in the 2006 census (DIC, 2007). Table 12 below shows the language/s that informants report speaking to their children. A double horizontal line distinguishes informants who speak ‘homeland’ languages only to their children (above the line) and informants who report speaking English with/out ‘homeland’ languages (below the line).

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Chal/Assr	77	24	14	29	<b>39</b>
Arabic	5	0	0	0	<b>2</b>
Chal/Assr+Arab	0	0	14	0	<b>3</b>
Chal/Assr+Arab+Eng	0	12	0	0	<b>3</b>
Chal/Assr+Eng	9	29	7	7	<b>14</b>
Arab+Eng	9	0	21	7	<b>8</b>
No response / Not applicable	0	35	44	57	<b>31</b>

Table 12: Language choice with children

Table 12 above shows predictably high use of homeland languages only amongst the users of interpreting services. All other groups have a high percentage of ‘no responses’ or ‘not applicable’ (= no children) answers. Many, particularly the ‘provider only’ group are younger (aver. age thirty-four) and less likely to have children. However, amongst the providers who have children, English is now a code that is used alongside the ‘homeland’ languages in about half of the providers’ families. The ‘neither/nor’ group appear to consist of some older informants who maintain their languages at home and a smaller group that also uses English with children. It is noteworthy that there are also a small group of user-only informant who report using English with their children which shows that in some cases, some home use of English still co-occurs with the need for interpreting services. This is a common scenario in many Australian households in which code-switching and receptive bilingual (English and another language) communication between the generations co-occurs with older family members still requiring interpreting services (cf Yamamoto, 1995; Hurtado & Vega, 2004). The following table records the language/s that informants report using to themselves.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Chal/Assr	43	17	0	0	<b>18</b>
Arabic	5	0	7	7	<b>5</b>
Chal/Assr+Arab	24	12	14	44	<b>22</b>
Chal/Assr+Arab+Eng	14	36	15	14	<b>19</b>
Chal/Assr+Eng	5	6	21	14	<b>11</b>
Arab+Eng	0	0	14	7	<b>5</b>
English	0	17	22	0	<b>9</b>
No response	9	12	7	14	<b>11</b>

Table 13: Language/s that informants think in

In Table 13 above a double horizontal line separates informants who think in homeland languages only (above the line) and those who also report using English as their language of thought.

For many multilinguals, the language that one thinks in is often related to the context or task that is commonly situated in a particular language. The language of thought is not necessarily revealing of a person's dominant language: many multilinguals report that they are required to think and work using their third or subsequent languages without a change in their view that these are non-dominant languages (Dewaele, 2011). Thought is context-specific and therefore environmentally conditioned but it is also self-generated and largely self-directed, reflecting on the one hand the contexts that one finds oneself in, and on the other hand the codes that one finds that are most amenable to do this. The conceptualisation and expression of emotions is also influenced by the language of ambient input, but even more so by the language/s of primary socialisation (Dewaele, 2004).

Overall, 45% of informants think only in a homeland language, 44% think in English with or without a homeland language while 11% gave no response. This shows in the first place the influence of the Anglophone environment, situation and functional competence. (Responses to questions "Which language/s do you dream in?", "Which language/s do you swear in?", "Which language/s do you count quickly in?" are not shown here but responses to the first two of these three questions are similar to those for the language of thought.) Predictably, the users only group thinks overwhelmingly in homeland languages. The user and provider and providers only groups show different responses. In the former group, 59% list English with or without a homeland language as their language/s of thought while in the latter group this percentage is 82%. Providing interpreting services is strongly correlated to use of English as (one of) the language(s) that an informant thinks in.

## 7.6 Social networks

Social networks mainly consist of non-relatives, and choices of establishing social relations and friendships with others indicate, in an émigré setting, with whom one spends one's free time. Ethnicity of social contacts need not determine language use, but language use is usually determined by ethnicity. Language use in the 'in-group', i.e. with Chaldean and Assyrian contacts is presented in Table 14 below.

Table 14 above shows that the 'user-only' group uses almost exclusively 'homeland' language in social interactions, while the presence of English together with homeland languages is now common amongst all other groups, in particular the provider-only group in which English is used to some extent in 72% of social contacts *with* in-group members. These responses show that English is now a contributing code in in-group situations

– this is one of the first signs of potential language shift amongst these groups (cf. Stoessel, 2002).

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Chal/Assr	43	17	7	21	<b>24</b>
Arabic	5	0	7	7	<b>5</b>
Chal/Assr+Arab	29	36	14	30	<b>30</b>
Chal/Assr+Arab+Eng	0	30	51	14	<b>21</b>
Chal/Assr+Eng	5	17	21	21	<b>15</b>
Arab+Eng	9	0	0	7	<b>5</b>

Table 14: Language choice with ‘in-group’ friends.

## 7.7 Media

Level of literacy and access to aural and visual media are important features which have an inter-related effect on language acquisition. For example, literacy level determines and facilitates the type and form of text that a person may access. At the same time, a person’s desire to access a type and form of text can facilitate their further acquisition of higher levels of literacy. The same applies to aurally or visually consumed media. Three types of media consumption were elicited, distinguished here to examine informants’ contact with media in their respective languages: television and DVDs; newspapers and news forums (paper and electronic); and general use of internet websites as social, educational or leisure outlets. Responses are shown here only for the last type of media, internet website use. These are similar to those for television/DVD and newspaper consumption

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Chal/Assr	0	0	0	7	<b>2</b>
Arabic	14	12	7	21	<b>13</b>
Chal/Assr+Arab	5	0	0	0	<b>2</b>
Chal/Assr+Arab+Eng	9	6	0	0	<b>5</b>
Arab+Eng	14	53	7	7	<b>21</b>
English	0	17	58	51	<b>28</b>
Don’t use / No response	58	12	28	14	<b>29</b>

Table 15: Language/s of internet websites

Use of the internet is more widespread than newspaper consumption. Of all four groups, the user-only group uses the internet least and largely accesses Arabic-language sites. The other groups also access many Arabic-language sites, while the majority of the provider-only group and the neither/nor group visit English-language sites. Although only 8% and 5% of informants claim literacy in Chaldean or Assyrian respectively, some informants perceive that sites that they access are also in Chaldean or Assyrian, on the basis of logos, titles or headings while the bulk of the content is in Arabic or English. Level of internet use and frequency of English-only content is higher among the non-users of interpreting services.

## 7.8 Linguistic ‘awareness’

The above sections record informants’ actual language use. This section seeks to elicit opinions about most informants’ ‘first’ language variety,

Chaldean or Assyrian and about the value and functions that these languages can have for future generations.

Language has been posited, according to some models, to represent a core value within a culture, i.e. not only is the function of communicative interactions important to the wellbeing of groups, but the form (language) that these communicative interactions are performed in is also important (cf. Smolicz, 1981; Smolicz, Secombe & Hunter, 2001). Conceptualisation of language as a value in itself is evidence of linguistic ‘consciousness’ or ‘awareness’. Interpreters are, by definition, linguistically ‘conscious’ and ‘aware’ speakers. Further, informants are asked about the incidence of ‘language-mixing’, the use of two or more codes in one utterance or communicative situation. The incidence of mixing and speakers’ attitudes towards it are also revealing of informants’ general linguistic ‘consciousness’.

Informants were first asked about their general attitude towards the Chaldean and Assyrian languages. All informants, including those who had shifted to Arabic provided answers to this question. Informants were invited to provide multiple responses. Total figures go beyond 100%.

		Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	Total %
Symbolic	Our original language	45	47	39	25	<b>41</b>
	Integral part of culture	29	54	43	14	<b>37</b>
Symbolic + Instrumental	Connecting link between Chal/Assr everywhere	14	30	7	7	<b>15</b>
	Defines who is Chal/Assr	0	17	0	0	<b>5</b>
Instrumental	Means of communication	9	17	29	7	<b>15</b>
	Enables me socially/occupationally	9	6	7	14	<b>9</b>
Aesthetic Positive	Rich, expressive language	34	17	14	21	<b>22</b>
Aesthetic Negative	Simple, unsophisticated language	0	6	14	0	<b>5</b>
No response		9	12	21	43	<b>19</b>

Table 16: Attitudes towards the Chaldean and Assyrian languages

The symbolic functions of Chaldean and Assyrian are the highest listed functions, followed by aesthetic functions (mostly positive) and instrumental functions. The responses are mixed and point to many things. Generally, those ‘abandoning’ a language are more likely to provide more positive ‘symbolic’ responses because the relationship that they have with that language is increasingly symbolic only. Those abandoning a language also record lower levels of viewing this language in an instrumental sense because it is ceasing to fulfil this function. And yet the possible candidates for abandonment, the providers, generally ascribe a higher instrumental value to Chaldean and Assyrian than other informants. It is possible that as lay interpreters, the providers have a more overt knowledge of language’s facilitative (i.e. instrumental) function. Those who ascribe a positive aesthetic value to these homeland languages are more likely to be from the ‘user-only’ group while any negative judgements come from the providers group. Generally, the ‘providers’ tend to display more instrumental and lower aesthetic attitudes towards their homeland language/s. The users have higher aesthetic attitudes and mixed symbolic and instrumental views towards it. Forty-three percent of the neither/nor group provided no response to this question.

Table 17 below records informants' responses to the phenomenon of language 'mixing', i.e. the use of two or more languages in an utterance or communicative interaction through insertion of words or forms from one language into another, alternation between languages within or at clause boundaries. The relevance of code-switching or mixing to interpreters is that the nature of interpreting requires attunement to the spoken varieties of others, whether these are monolingual or mixed. Interpreters, lay or trained, are required to register code-switching norms of speakers and may code-switch and mix themselves if this is the unmarked and habitualised code of particular interlocutors or of entire speech communities. (Code-switching is a widely-reported phenomenon in many community interpreting settings in Australia, cf. Hlavac, 2010.) Interpreters have an awareness of this, regardless of whether their views towards this phenomenon are normative or indifferent. I wish to distinguish this feature of awareness from the practice of code-switching itself. Some may believe that interpreters are likely to code-switch more frequently due to cross-linguistic transfer that occurs in interpreting while others may believe that interpreters are less likely to code-switch as they have a high-level command of two or more languages and do not have the 'lexical gaps' between two languages that can motivate some lay speakers to 'borrow across languages'. In their behaviour, interpreters differ little from others. Evidence from studies of community interpreting show that despite the 'gatekeeping' function (Davidson, 2004) that some interpreters assume and that despite requests from some interpreters that speakers not code-switch (Angermeyer, 2010, pp.474), interpreters can be found to not only code-switch (Angermeyer, 2010, p.484) but to employ it as an "effort management strategy" when it is appropriate and acceptable in the (mixed) target language (Cheung, 2001, p.61). Code-switching is, in translation studies, also a less well-studied phenomenon (cf. Wilss, 1977, p.62; Hervey, Higgins & Loughridge, 1995, pp.104-5).

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Yes	91	94	93	72	<b>83</b>
No	9	6	7	7	<b>11</b>
No response	0	0	0	21	<b>6</b>

Table 17: Incidence of language mixing

Table 17 above shows that language mixing is a widespread phenomenon. Odisho (1993) and Sengstock (2005) report that borrowing and code-switching are common features of the speech of many multilinguals in Iraq, particularly that of Chaldeans who code-switch more frequently into Arabic than Assyrians. Incidences of mixing between *all* varieties are recorded. However, most commonly, informants report that while speaking Chaldean or Assyrian, they import English words or forms (53%), Arabic words or forms (45%); when speaking Arabic 35% of informants import English words or forms; other combinations such as Chaldean or Assyrian intruding into Arabic (8%) and Chaldean and Assyrian into English (5%) are less common. There are no differences in the groups in their reported incidence of mixing. This supports the above assumption that providers' linguistic behaviour does not differ from that of users. Frequency of mixing across all groups is less likely to be a consequence of 'incomplete acquisition' or 'lack of concern for one's language' but rather is likely to reflect the unmarked, i.e. habitualised nature of speech of Chaldeans and Assyrians in which contribution from two (or more) codes is permitted and unremarkable. There is little evidence that mixing is sanctioned behaviour: 51% view it indifferently while only 24% view it negatively. Table 18 below lists informants' accounts for why they 'mix'.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Other word comes to me faster	24	47	36	28	<b>32</b>
It's how others speak	10	18	43	21	<b>20</b>
Always mixed like this	5	30	0	7	<b>11</b>
Don't know word	0	12	14	0	<b>6</b>
No response	61	6	7	44	<b>31</b>

Table 18: Accounts for the incidence of language mixing

Accounts of why language phenomena occur indicate different perceptions of what controls speech. Accounts such as “other word comes to me faster” and “don’t know the word” are individually based in that a speaker attributes mixing to immediacy of activation or gaps in his or her own individual lexicons. Other accounts are not so individually based. The argument that it occurs because “[I or others have] always mixed like this” is based on mixing being a habitualised variety acquired in a way similar to any monolingual variety. The account that it occurs because “it’s how others speak” is more than just recognition of a habitualised variety but evidence of accommodating and converging to others’ varieties. There are statistical differences in the accounts given by the different groups. The providers of interpreting services are more likely to give socially-based accounts for their behaviour than individual accounts. This shows that providers of interpreting services, when accounting for some of the ways that they speak, are more likely to attribute this to the desire to emulate the speech styles of others. Convergence to others’ styles is further explored in section 7.10 below.

### 7.9 Self-representation

Most categories of description are single entities that refer to one attribute only. When referring to themselves, bi- and multilinguals are often faced with the choice of having to settle for a single attribute or having to battle for a more nuanced description. All informants belong to the Chaldean or Assyrian communities resident in Melbourne. Informants can make choices between single representations: either Chaldean or Assyrian or Iraqi or Australian; or dual or composite representations such as Chaldean-Assyrian or Iraqi-Australian. Informants were invited to nominate the way that they see themselves and were invited to list multiple representations. 28% nominated single-entity representations while 78% preferred composite terms. Table 19 below shows their responses. A double horizontal line separates responses that do not include the attribute ‘Australian’ from those that do.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	<b>Total %</b>
Chaldean	19	0	7	7	<b>9</b>
Chaldean-Assyrian	9	6	0	0	<b>5</b>
Assyrian	0	0	7	0	<b>2</b>
Iraqi	24	0	0	28	<b>13</b>
Chaldean-Australian	5	29	14	7	<b>13</b>
Assyrian-Australian	0	6	0	0	<b>2</b>
Iraqi-Australian	43	47	51	58	<b>48</b>
Australian	0	6	14	0	<b>5</b>
No response	0	6	7	0	<b>3</b>

Table 19: Informants’ self-descriptions

Table 19 above shows that bi-national terms are more common than mono-national ones. The terms that informants choose range from ones based on ethnicity, nation-homeland to adopted home society whose citizenship most informants now possess. 'Iraqi' is a term that is more widely chosen by informants than 'Chaldean' and/or 'Assyrian': 62% of informants choose 'Iraqi' alone or in combination with other attributes compared to 32% for 'Chaldean' and/or 'Assyrian' with or without other attributes. The term 'Iraqi-Australian' is preferred by approximately half of all groups of informants but there are differences between the groups as to how they view themselves. The users-only and neither/nor groups are more closely tied to the terms 'Chaldean' or 'Iraqi' than the either of the provider groups. Both provider groups are more likely to include the attribute 'Australian' in their self-descriptions: 88% for the users & providers group and 79% for the providers-only group. The only informants who self-describe as 'Australians' are to be found in these groups.

### **7.10 Accommodation to other speech varieties**

In reference to spoken language, the term 'accommodation' is often employed as a hypernym referring to features that speakers may employ in their speech that converge towards or diverge from the speech of others (cf. Speech Accommodation Theory – Giles, 1973; Communication Accommodation Theory - Giles, et al., 1991). According to an analysis of accommodation in speech, macro-level features such as class, gender or age may be perceived and conventionalised to the extent that speakers less consciously make decisions about whether to adjust their speech and if so, how much, and whether this is expected from their interlocutors. Micro-level circumstances such as context of interaction, topic of conversation or shifts of footing may also shape accommodation. Accommodation may be exercised by one or all speakers, and movement towards (convergence) or away from (divergence) each other may be symmetric or asymmetric. In non-interpreted interactions, accommodation and associated notions such as audience design (Bell, 1984), crossing (Rampton, 1995) and passing (Piller, 2002) are socio-psychologically-conditioned phenomena that have been widely studied.

In interpreting situations, macro- as well as micro-features affect the way that non-interpreter interlocutors approach the communicative situation, but the non-interpreter interlocutors do not have the ability to accommodate linguistically towards or away from each other, except perhaps in intonation and stress and through paralinguistic features such as volume, body language, eye contact etc. While an interpreter is performing the task of inter-lingual communication, the task of the situation requires him or her not to converge towards but to replicate source language utterances. Replication is not possible without the ability to closely observe not only the content of another's speech, but also its form on all linguistic and discourse levels. Many interpreters are, using the terms of accommodation theory, and in linguistic terms only, 'convergers', 'crossers' and 'passers' par excellence. This section, further to the responses discussed above in section 7.8, seeks to elicit informants' reported attunement to others' speech, a key attribute of interpreting. Interestingly, in a study looking at non-interpreters' speech with human and 'machine' (i.e. electronic voice recognition) interpreters, Fais and Loken-Kim (1995) report that speakers measurably accommodate towards the lexical choices provided from human interpreter speech and less so from machine output. Accommodation can be observed amongst all participants in interpreted interactions.

As stated in section 5, this study does not elicit informants' speech or their lay interpreting skills. Information about informants' accommodation towards others' varieties are based on self-assessments of their own speech,

not on analyses of it by others. Table 20 below contains responses to differing speech varieties and informants' accommodation towards or non-accommodation from them.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor	Total %
Yes, changes according to speakers of other Chal/Assr dialects	24	53	49	7	<b>35</b>
Yes, changes according to speakers of other varieties of Arabic	5	30	27	7	<b>16</b>
Yes, changes according to speakers of Chal/Assr or Arabic of different age groups	9	3	7	7	<b>5</b>
No, my speech has not changed at all	39	24	14	58	<b>31</b>
No response	24	17	14	21	<b>19</b>

Table 20: Accommodation and non-accommodation towards other speech varieties.

Table 20 above contains responses to questions about other speech varieties of which the first two refer to others' regiolects (regional dialect) while the last one refers to others' sociolects (social dialect). Overall, half of all informants state either that their speech does not change, regardless of whom they are speaking to (31%), or do not provide a response (19%). Those who do accommodate provided multiple answers. There are differences between the groups: the provider groups report high levels of accommodation towards other regiolects, less so to other aged-based sociolects. The other groups report lower incidences of accommodation. Regional dialects are, in a lay sense, more conspicuous than social ones and it is not surprising that providers recognise themselves as speakers who attune themselves to them – a correlative feature they share with trained interpreters (cf. Gentile, Ozolins & Vasilakakos, 1996, pp.87-88; Corsellis, 2008, pp.142-3).

## 8. Discussion

Table 21 below collates the prominent features (e.g. first and second most common responses) from sections 7.1 to 7.10 above.

	Users only	Users & Providers	Providers only	Neither/ Nor
Spoken English	Fair-good	Good-fair	Good-excellent	Good-fair
Previous instruction in English in home country	0%	47%	64%	37%
Average age	46	37	34	40
Average length of stay in Australia (years)	8	8	7	9
Year 12 completed	25%	56%	77%	51%
Not in Aust. labour market	87%	70%	61%	83%
All family members in Aust.	34%	47%	36%	14%
	Users only	Users &	Providers	Neither/

		Providers	only	Nor
Future place of residence – ‘Australia only’	5%	59%	72%	21%
Lang. choice with children	Chal/Assr, Chal/Assr + Eng	Not applicable, Chal/Assr + Eng	Not applicable, Arab + Eng	No applicable, Chal/Assr
Lang. of thought	Chal/Assr, Chal/Assr + Arab	Chal/Assr + Arab + Eng, English	English, Chal/Assr + Eng	Chal/Assr + Arab + Eng
Lang. choice with friends	Chal/Assr + Arab	Chal/Assr + Arab + Eng	Chal/Assr + Arab + Eng	Chal/Assr + Arab
Lang of media	Arabic	Arabic + Eng	Arabic, English	Arabic, English
Attitudes towards L1	Symbolic, aesthetically positive	Symbolic, instrumental	Symbolic, aesthetically neutral	Symbolic, aesthetically positive
‘Mix’ languages	91%	94%	93%	72%
Self-description	Iraqi-Australian, Iraqi	Iraqi-Australian, Chaldean-Australian	Iraqi-Australian, Chaldean-Australian	Iraqi-Australian, Iraqi
Accommodation to others’ dialects	Low, moderate	High	High	Moderate

Table 21: Summary of features for all four groups

Across groups, informants show similarity in length of stay, place of residence of other family members, ethnicity of social networks, language use in social networks, self-representation through first and surnames. It is noteworthy that a number of informants report having been both users and providers. When interpreting for newly arrived clients, it is not unusual to hear a pledge from clients that as soon as they acquire the new language to a suitable standard they would like to interpret for others. Within the ranks of professional interpreters it is hard to quantify how many were frequent users who were motivated by the services of others to become practitioners. These kinds of details are sometimes mentioned as by-lines in biographies (e.g. Gostich, 2010, p.105ff.) but do not generally figure in professional profiles of practitioners (Badalotti, 2010). That a quarter of this sample’s informants belongs to this group may indicate that this group is larger than otherwise thought.

To recapitulate firstly on the profiles of users, informants who are only users display many features which conform to their stereotypical image: lower level of English, low level of formal instruction in that language, representing an older demographic of their community, lower level of education, not employed or not active in the paid labour force, use of the first language in interactions with other family members, friends and media and positive symbolic and aesthetic evaluations of their first language. There are some features which they share with other groups: their average length of residence in Australia is no different from other groups (amongst a recently-arrived sample, this is perhaps not unexpected) and the number of other family members that they have in Australia. Users generally feel settled, but fewer are categorical about Australia being their only future place of residence.

The user and provider group, as suggested above, is a group that is perhaps more numerous than otherwise thought: over a quarter of the sample belongs to this group. This group, in many respects, occupies a ‘mid-point’ position between users and providers. They are younger, better educated and

more settled than the users but not as young, not as well educated and not as well settled as the provider-only group. They also rate their English skills not as highly as the providers and are less likely to have had formal contact with English before arrival. But in other areas they are similar to the providers: language choice with children and friends, language of thought, attitude towards first language and in their self-description.

The providers conform to a stereotypical image of providers in many ways: age, education level, formal instruction in English before and after arrival in Australia, degree of settledness, bi-national self-identification and even early signs that some are using English as much as their first language with the next generation. The younger age of the providers-only group conforms to a general stereotype of lay interpreting which includes child interpreting (e.g. Jacobs, Kroll, Green & David, 1995) and interpreting performed by adolescents and young adults (Rosenberg, Seller & Leanza, 2008). Self-diagnosed language level is predictably higher amongst providers, but there are still providers who rate their English as 'fair' (26% of Group 2 and 14% of Group 3) and even 'poor' (17% of Group 2). High-level language skills are a typical, but not absolute characteristic of these lay interpreters. This feature is also likely to correlate with previous formal instruction in English and with the feature of a 'community activism', which, according to Schrover and Vermeulen (2005) is an attribute found more often amongst higher than lower educated immigrants. Thus, education may directly correlate to being a provider or more indirectly through being indicative of other features which themselves motivate immigrants to volunteer their services as lay interpreters. Level of qualification, skill level, type of employment in Iraq and, in particular, in Australia remain unclear factors. While it is apparent that a higher percentage of providers are also in skilled, semi- or un-skilled employment in Australia, a large percentage is not actively involved in the labour force. Employment may be an ambivalent factor: employment facilitates the learning of linguistic and occupational skills conducive to interpreting; lack of formal employment allows informants to provide lay interpreting that they may otherwise not be able to provide; availability of time amongst providers may motivate others to avail themselves of providers' services.

Interestingly, the providers had not resided in Australia for a longer period than the other groups. A longer period of residence in a new environment is generally conducive to the ability to take on a role that requires linguistic skills and culturally-specific knowledge of two groups. However, this data is in line with other, anecdotal data of recently-arrived highly-proficient bilinguals from Croatia, Italy and Macedonia known to the author, who work with largely monolingual clients who have been in Australia for many decades. Many of these recently-arrived interpreters are highly-educated, which correlates with the generally higher education level of the providers.

The 'neither/nor' group is harder to define. The variation between the responses of informants in this group suggests that some were similar to the 'user-only' group, but even older and more isolated so that they had little or no direct experience with translingual interactions in Australia and relied on others to perform interactions with English-speakers. On the other hand, a number of informants from this group provided responses that patterned in a way similar to the 'provider-only' group. They were younger, had a higher rate of year 12 completion, and higher rating of their English skills. At the same time, overall this group appeared to be less settled, less sure about future place of residence, less likely to be employed and therefore to be less 'engaged' with their immediate environment. This perhaps also explains their non-involvement in providing (or using) interpreting services.

The majority of all informants have all or most of their family members in Australia and providers of interpreting services do not differ from the other groups in this regard. All informants appear to have family support networks – the existence of these networks enables the providers to fulfil the role they fulfil – as providers of lay interpreting services within these networks to other family members as the most likely recipients of them. Australia, as an on-going future place of residence, is nominated by a large number of providers and users. This may indicate that ‘intention to stay’ and ‘settledness’ stimulate acquisition of English amongst the providers and the cultivation of bilingual networks including providers amongst users. Actual length of stay is almost uniform amongst all groups indicating that this is not a correlative factor to being a provider or user.

Attitudes towards language purism and ‘mixing’ are largely indifferent. Both providers and users report ‘mixing’ between their languages. Providers are also more likely to report that they accommodate their speech to the speech of speakers of other varieties of Chaldean, Assyrian and/or Arabic. This is congruent to expectations that interpreting requires greater attunement to others’ speech.

Accommodation and attunement to others’ speech varieties emerges as a feature that providers share with professional interpreters. It is not clear whether this feature is a recently-developed or ‘learnt’ one, based on the activity of lay interpreting or whether it is a general characteristic of some speakers that pre-disposes them to interpret for others, in combination with other personal attributes. This and other features invite investigation in further research on users, lay and professional interpreters. The findings in this empirically-based paper offer a snapshot view of a recently-migrated group of speakers and the incidence of interpreting.

Although this paper does not examine interactions in which informants have been participants (as users or providers), it is possible to relate research from other studies on lay interpreting to the data here. It is likely that many of the providers in this sample, notwithstanding their own proficiency self-ratings, engage in interactions in which they hear and attempt to reproduce complex and nuanced speech in both their languages. In Valdés et al. (2000), young Spanish-English bilinguals were required to carry out complex communicative activities as language brokers in bilingual interactions. Many gifted bilinguals were able to perform difficult interpreting tasks with apparent ease without formal training. But even the gifted bilinguals are distinguished from their professionally employed counterparts in at least one of the following two ways: “they... mediate the interaction between members of communities with which they had strong bonds and cultural ties, and... they did not have the privilege of choosing among the interactions, settings, topics and situations in which they interpreted” (Angelelli, 2010. p100). This suggests that the providers are required to be adaptable to a variety of situations, and that their role is not detached and neutral but involved and sometimes perhaps partisan.

The skills and experiences of lay interpreters should not be discounted in discussions of interpreters’ roles and in interpreter training. Where lay providers enter formal training courses, their own experiences of negotiating and interacting in bilingual encounters provide real and tangible models for all trainees (cf. Lai & Mulayim, 2010). In interpreter training courses these experiences can be discussed and employed in relation to attributes that professional interpreters are required to develop: role of the interpreter to other parties, ethics of the profession, confidentiality and impartiality, conflicts of interest, stress management, awareness of one’s limitations. Those trainees who were once also users may relate their perspectives and the notion of trust as a key feature in users’ (positive) experiences when working with interpreters (cf. Edwards, Temple & Alexander, 2005, pp.90-91). This is

an important feature of interpreting, and the notion of trust can be looked at not only from the perspective of a minority language speaker but also from the perspective of others and how they extend trust to a practitioner (e.g. through displaying impartiality and good conduct, respecting confidentiality).

## 9. Conclusion

The role that lay interpreters play is important in a local sense, if risk-laden and problematic at times. Fortunately, in Melbourne and elsewhere in the state of Victoria, the contribution and role of recently-arrived migrants with bilingual skills and their potential to be trained to become interpreters has been recognised. The Victorian Multicultural Commission (now Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship) sponsored training packages in metropolitan and rural areas for speakers of new and emerging languages, including Assyrian in 2009 and Chaldean in 2010 (see Appendix for a program description). The sociolinguistic profiles of this sample's informants give a detailed and descriptive picture of a group of interpreting services clients that receive little attention – the users of lay services. The profiles also provide complementary data to existing knowledge on lay providers that has previously focussed largely on their linguistic inadequacy and often problematic role.

This study goes beyond a description of language skills as the sole or primary factor for why certain members of a bilingual community perform lay interpreting services. This paper identifies further attributes such as age, degree of settledness, overall use of the language of the host society and reported incidence of attunement (in socio-psychological terms) to others' speech. In this way, this paper has examined lay interpreters from a broader perspective than that of normative-based studies which locate deficient attributes amongst them or who bemoan a lack of service provision that leads to 'obliging bilinguals' acting in a makeshift way to bridge communication differences.

The quantitative focus of the paper allows an insight into the frequency of use and provision of lay interpreting services in a recently-arrived community and how this is an apparently common and unremarkable feature in most informants' lives. The data also allows us to profile lay interpreters, in a macro-sense, beyond incidentally and anecdotally collected descriptions. The data suggests that lay interpreting is a commonplace, perhaps even 'embedded' phenomenon in this community's communicative practices with most out-group members. But the data is not able to uncover informants' subjective notions of the 'embeddedness' or 'peripherality' of lay interpreting in their lives and in relative, as well as absolute terms, in the community as a whole. In any case, lay interpreting appears as an unmarked social act in the lives of most informants, different from the perspective of trainee interpreters for example, who consciously view interpreting as a future vocation.

The sociolinguistic analysis of this paper goes beyond a purely linguistic (i.e. proficiency-based) treatment of lay interpreting and locates social, family, attitudinal and vocational features amongst its protagonists. These, in turn, suggest that lay interpreters may recognise not only their linguistic, but inter-personal, cross-cultural and possibly activist role in bilingual interactions. These attributes are not complementary but largely integral to those required of professional interpreters: attracting lay interpreters to formal training therefore presents itself as opportune.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The term 'lay interpreting' is used throughout this paper to refer to interpreting performed by unpaid and untrained individuals. The protagonists of lay interpreting in this study do not see themselves as 'interpreters' but as bi- or multi-linguals who, in their day-to-day interactions, require or provide cross-linguistic interchange. The term 'lay' is used in preference to other terms used to refer to the same phenomenon. Harris and Sherwood's (1978) term 'natural interpreting' is not chosen due to the unfortunate connotation that the converse term, 'professional' interpreting, could be considered 'unnatural'. The term 'untrained' is not used as there are many professional and accredited interpreters in Australia who are also 'untrained', i.e. they have passed the NAATI accreditation test but not undergone any training. The term 'ad-hoc' is not used as many lay interpreters perform this task not on an ad-hoc but on a regular and on-going basis. The term 'novice' interpreter is not used as lay interpreters do not generally see themselves as apprentices learning a skill that they will further develop, nor are they necessarily 'young' or 'unskilled'.

<sup>2</sup> Approval to contact potential informants and collect data was granted by the Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH), Monash University. Project Number 2007002093.

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## Appendix

Information flyer from the Victorian Multicultural Commission for regional interpreter training

**VICTORIAN**  
**multicultural**  
**commission**

GPO Box 4698, Melbourne VIC, 3001  
T. 03 9651 0651  
F. 03 9651 0612  
www.multicultural.vic.gov.au

### REGIONAL INTERPRETER SKILLS 2010 TRAINING COURSE GEELONG

**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN INTERPRETING?  
THIS COURSE COULD BE THE FIRST STEP TO AN  
EXCITING CAREER IN INTERPRETING**

#### STUDY TO BECOME AN INTERPRETER

The Victorian Multicultural Commission is offering Victorians in the regional areas the opportunity to study the basic skills of interpreting and gain a snap-shot of the language services industry through the 2010 Regional Interpreter Skills Course.

#### WHAT IS AN INTERPRETER?

An interpreter is a person who transfers meaning from one language into another to help people who speak different languages to communicate.

#### STUDY THE BASIC SKILLS OF INTERPRETING

Successful applicants will undertake a short course which will introduce the basic techniques and skills of interpreting.

#### WHAT LANGUAGES DO I NEED?

The Regional Interpreter Skills Course is not a language specific course. If you are proficient in English and any of the target Languages Other than English (LOTE) you are eligible to apply. The priority languages for the program are languages which are recognised by the Victorian Government as being in short supply for interpreting services. Speakers of other languages are encouraged to apply and will be considered if places are available. Speakers of the nominated languages (below) will be prioritised.

**Priority languages include:**

Acholi	Amharic	Arabic (Sudanese)	Bari	Burmese
Chaldean	Creole	Dari	Dinka	Dzhongka
Eastern Kaya	Ewe	Falam (Chin)	Fanti	Fula
Fur	Gan	Haka (Chin)	Hazaragi	Hmong
Ikbo	Kachin	Kakwa	Kannadai	Karen
Khmer	Kikuyu	Kingoni	Kinyarwanda	Kirundi
Kono	Kpelle	Krio	Kuku	Kurdish (Kurmanji)
Kurdish (Sorani)	Lao	Liberian Pidgin	Lingala	Lisu
Loko	Luo	Madl	Mandingo	Mara (Chin)
Maru	Mende	Mina	Mizo (Chin)	Moru
Nepali	Nuer	Oromo	Pojulu	Rohingya
Sinhalese	Siyam	Sukuma	Susu	Swahili
Tamil	Temne	Tidim (Chin)	Tigre	Tigrinya
Tshiluba	Twí	Uighur	Uzbek	Watchi
Yalunka	Zande	Zomi (Chin)	Zonot (Chin)	