Using the Tarjimly Interpretation App to Enhance Refugee Integration and Communication at Iskashitaa Refugee Network and Worldwide.

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Background

Iskashitaa Refugee Network is a Tucson-based NGO that provides services to asylum seekers and UN resettled refugees, using food as a means of community integration. Language barriers have been an ongoing challenge in the 18 years of the organization’s existence.

Refugee needs often extend past resettlement agency support, and many small organizations and grassroots efforts in Tucson support the efforts of the resettlement offices through creative programming.
• **Tarjimly** is a mobile app that translates for refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants

• Founded during the Syrian refugee crisis in 2016, the **human right to be heard and understood** is a core value of the company
Problem:

Situations with refugees and asylum seekers needed more nuanced communication than provided by AI translation.

- Clients are refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and humanitarian organizations including resettlement agencies, NGOs, lawyers and medical clinics
The Tarjimly interface on a mobile phone
Volunteer interpreters sign up to be contacted by the app.

When a request for translation is made, machine learning is used to identify a pool of the most appropriate interpreters from over (currently) 14,000 volunteers, and they are connected with users within about 2 minutes.

60 languages are presently available, less common languages may require more time to find an interpreter, most features are free.
• The Tarjimly app is available worldwide and is not connected to another communication platform like Whatsapp or Facebook

• The user can have a conference call between themselves, another user, and the interpreter

• The app allows texts and images to be exchanged between the interpreter and user, and Zoom calls are also available
Translation/interpretation and asylum cases:

• If an uncommon language is requested for an asylum case, this needs to be arranged before their asylum merits hearing (Benton 2019)

• Asylum cases filed in minority languages that UNHCR does not have an interpreter for are automatically rejected
Interpretation issues in real life: personal medical information

- In small communities of language-speakers, an interpreter may know a client in an interpretation situation where private medical information is being discussed.

- Agencies and NGOs may not have the capacity or knowledge to keep information private.
Interpretation issues in real life: asylum case information

- Personal information may put someone at risk, particularly if asylum is denied and they are deported to a country where they are endangered.
Translation cases from other users:

- Eritrean family needed guidance about safety information during California wildfires
- A Haitian asylum seeker wanted advice from an attorney
- US caseworkers interview newly resettled refugees about their work history
- A Syrian family needed a child’s school evaluation translated

Tarjimly.org
Our experiences with Tarjimly app:

Talking to an older refugee who had been in the US for years, but experienced social isolation because of language barriers

Letting refugee volunteers know time and place of programs and appointments
Future Directions

• More interpreters for less represented languages

• Indigenous languages

• Request for female translators in specific situations

• HIPAA compliance (paid version)
References and Acknowledgements

R-GAP and Iskashitaa Program Volunteers

Sara at Tarjimly
https://www.techsoup.org/community/events-webinars/apps-for-organizations-working-with-refugees-and-immigrants-2021-08-17
