

'Even with my English, I could tell it wasn't right'

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CASE STUDY: WHEN **ALI Siavashi*** had his application for asylum translated from Persian into English, he began to grow worried.

The interpreter contracted by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (Orac) produced a version of his statement which was considerably shorter and which did not appear to contain correct place names and other key details.

Even with my English, I could tell it wasn't right, says Siavashi, an Iranian national. I wanted to get some independent expert advice about the translation to see if it was accurate or not.

At his request, the Irish Translators and Interpreters Association (ITIA) commissioned an independent translation by a professional translator from Persian to English.

The difference between the two versions was dramatic.

The first Orac-commissioned version ran to 3,816 words, while the one commissioned by the association was just under 5,000 words. There were dozens of omissions in the Orac version, and at least 214 errors. Some passages in the statement were significantly different and, in some cases, incoherent.

His initial application for asylum was refused. However, he later secured residency status when he went to the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, using a new translation of his statement.

The translations, seen by *The Irish Times*, are significantly different. The following is an extract from the association's version where he told how Iranian authorities arrived outside his business one day.

I thought it very likely that they were also armed because they were wearing plain clothes and ordinary jackets, but they were not noticeably or obviously armed.

The Orac version states:

In case of resistance from us it was more likely they had weapons but they were dressed in private uniform with jackets. Superficially they looked without weapon.

In another part of his statement, he explains in detail how authorities brought official documents with them when they shut down his business.

The association's version read:

Without any introduction, they showed me a copy of the ruling to seal off my company, issued by the Revolutionary Court addressed to the Office of Intelligence Deputy of the Armed Forces for the Tehran region. They also showed me the order from the Department of Public Places for west Tehran which was based on the above-mentioned sealing order.

The Orac version states:

Without any interaction they showed me the order of the closing down of the company, which was from the revolutionary court written with the assistance of Itelahat of Intazame region of Tehran and the order from the west part of Tehran in regarding the order of the closing down.

The association says the first translation of Siavashi's statement is inadequate and incompetent.

The Orac version was translated in 2005 by an interpreting firm which has since closed down, according to the association. A separate company now has the Orac contract.

In a statement, Orac said it regularly monitors its interpretation suppliers. This involves regular meetings with the management of the relevant company to ensure the interpreters are professional in the course of their duty.

It said EUR 1.2 million was spent on interpretation and translation last year.

Under the contract for interpreting and translation, the service provider is responsible for the selection of interpreters and for ensuring the competency and proficiency in both English and the language/dialect required of interpreters. Interpreters are also required to have undergone training on the asylum process, arranged by the interpretation company.

The name of the asylum applicant has been changed at his request