

Module 1: Conceptual Framework

Lesson 1.8



Working with a
Language Assistant



Learning Outcomes

- Communicate using a language assistant (LA)
- Establish an effective form of communication between themselves and the local population



Lesson Content

- Language assistant considerations
- Preparing your language assistant
- Working with your language assistant
- Debriefing the language assistant



Language Assistant Considerations

Role of a Language Assistant (LA)

To interpret accurately and dispassionately the exact meaning and nuance of words and phrases spoken during a discussion between two parties who do not speak a common language.





Language Assistants can be divided into two groups:

- Individuals coming from the Troop Contributing Country (TCC)
- Local civilians, hired by the military component or by the Mission itself in the host country



Language Assistant Considerations

- Language assistants are **not** professionally trained interpreters
- If your UNIBAT has more than one LA available, pick someone who fits the tactical situation and you get along with
- Be prepared to support your language assistant's administrative requirements



Language Skills

- What is their native language?
- What other languages do they speak?
- Where did they learn the other languages?
- Do they have previous language assistant experience?



Additional Considerations

- Physical Fitness
- Gender and sex
- Ethnic, tribal, or cultural



Preparing your Language Assistant

Information to give your LA

Your mission / goal for the engagement

Questions they may get asked

Ask about their local knowledge

Equipment to bring

Type of translation and when they start translation

Conduct Rehearsals with your LA



Positioning



The language assistant should be positioned to the side of the speaker, not between the speaking parties, but this is not always possible.



When to begin translation:

- When to start
- Ensure that everything is being translated
- Your LA is responsible for ensuring both sides receive all the information



Rehearsals

Signals between you and the language assistant:

- For example: when I touch your arm I am talking to you

Actions on if something happens or something is suspicious:

- Make sure you have SOPs for your team, and that your LA knows what they are and has practiced

First Aid:

- Make sure your LA knows some basic first aid and can help themselves as needed



3. Working with your Language Assistant

- Maintain eye contact with the other party, not your LA
- Speak in short sentences, do not use the third person
- Use basic vocabulary
- Always be aware of security for you and your LA



Your Language Assistant is a member of your team

- Make them feel like a part of the team
- Ask them to assist you in improving your command of the local language
- Learn about the local culture and share yours
- Always maintain a professional relationship



Debriefing your Language Assistant

Review the engagement with your LA

- Ask for their understanding of how the meeting went
- Ask your language assistant for their feedback/observations/notes
- Review any difficulties experienced with translation process
- Provide feedback on their performance



Learning Activity

Working with a LA

- You will work in groups of three
- Two people will have a conversation, the third will act as a LA (can use the same language)



Take Away

- Preparation and planning are key elements when working with a language assistant
- Be aware of risks and potential security issues
- Consider the cultural sensitivity of topics, questions, and answers
- Brief your language assistant about the engagement and their expected role



QUESTIONS?