

No vegemite and toast for breakfast: cultural and linguistic challenges in healthcare interpreting

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The presentation examines communication challenges which arise in interpreter-mediated healthcare consultations for Korean patients in Australia. From the perspectives of language and culture, it explores interpreting issues reported by healthcare interpreters from Korean backgrounds in Australia. As for linguistic challenges, data analysis identifies three specific issues: the untranslatability of certain emotions and feelings in Korean; medical concepts specific to Korean contexts; and medical terms which are simple in English but are not straightforward to Korean patients. Cultural challenges include negative perceptions of mental illnesses among Korean people, patients' tendency to view doctors as authorities and a lack of cultural sensitivity in cognitive assessments for elderly patients. In navigating those challenges, interpreters try to employ various professional strategies, yet healthcare providers' lack of cultural awareness and the general perception of interpreters as translation machines are identified as significant obstacles to achieving successful communication. The study highlights collaboration between interpreters and healthcare providers as a critical element in ensuring communication success and concludes with several key suggestions to achieve the goal.