

Dream Jobs: Interpreter

By Graham Snowdon, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.03.16

Word Count **675**



Pedro Quezada swears to tell the truth through an interpreter during his appearance in state Superior Court in Paterson, New Jersey, April 1, 2013. AP/Mel Evans

Neetu Mahandru won't forget her first day as a court interpreter. She had been called into the courtroom to translate, or put into English, what a group of men were saying.

They had been charged with a crime in England. However, the men were all Punjabi speakers. This language is native to Pakistan and India.

It was Mahandru's job to tell the court in English what the men were saying.

Words In Another Language

"I was pretty nervous," she says. Up until that first day in court, Mahandru had been teaching English as a second language. She had just started taking translation jobs as a freelancer. This is when people work for themselves rather than for a company. They accept jobs as they are offered.

Mahandru is fluent in Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and English. She uses her language abilities to speak English for those who cannot. Most of her work takes place in courtrooms, police stations and law firms. She must capture the meaning of people's words as precisely as she can, even if she does not like the person speaking or does not agree with him or her.

"I have to be careful I don't add any words and only say what the person I'm translating for says," Mahandru explains. "In court, everything is recorded, and they can take the tape out and check it with something else."

Sometimes words can have two meanings and she must ask the person what they mean exactly so the English is written correctly.

Precision And Speed

Mahandru must also be able to translate at the same speed that the person is speaking. It can be difficult to keep up sometimes.

She arrived in Britain as an innocent 19-year-old from the Punjab, in northern India. She was to settle into an arranged marriage, which did not last. She realized she would need to find a job. Mahandru's gift for linguistics had not yet been cultivated.

Her light-bulb moment came when she started talking to a man on a bus who was reading a German dictionary. "He told me he was moving to Germany," she remembers. "He said, 'You can't get the feel of a country until you learn the language.' I realized then that, although I knew several languages, I wasn't making any use of them."

Soon, Mahandru was working as an interpreter and teaching Punjabi. She quickly made a name for herself and more translation work followed.

She never has to look far to realize how different life in England might have been. She has been very fortunate.

"When I go to a police station and see Indian women, they're sitting there with their babies, they don't know the language," Mahandru says. "I think, 'What's their life? What are they gonna do?'"

Job Stats

Pay: "I'm a single parent and I'm comfortable, so it's good." An experienced interpreter might earn around £35,000 (\$43,000) per year.

Hours: As a freelancer, "I did 40 last week and I've got 15 so far this week. So whenever work comes in, really, I have to take it and deliver it when required."

Work-life balance: "I enjoy being a mom, but working for yourself has its challenges. Bless my little girl, she'll never moan if I'm working all hours. She'll say something like, 'Come on, let's go out.'"

Highs: "Variety. Going from place to place, meeting different people."

Lows: It can be difficult translating court cases because the details are sometimes sad.

Overtime

Mahandru does not watch much TV. "I'm more of a listening person, I listen to BBC Asian Network. I've learned a lot of my English listening to the radio."

She spends her holidays in India. "We usually go twice a year. I want my daughter to know her culture, her grandparents. I haven't traveled around much, I'd like to see the south."

Mahandru says she feels more at home in England, but, "It's a clash! My morals are more Indian, my mind is more English. This country has given me my own recognition, it's where I want to live."

Quiz

- 1 Select the sentence from the section "Words In Another Language" that BEST explains what Mahandru does at work.
- (A) Up until that first day in court, Mahandru had been teaching English as a second language.
 - (B) She had just started taking translation jobs as a freelancer.
 - (C) She uses her language abilities to speak English for those who cannot.
 - (D) "I have to be careful I don't add any words and only say what the person I'm translating for says," Mahandru explains.
- 2 Based on information in the article, which of these statements is TRUE?
- (A) As an interpreter, Neetu Mahandru works in courtrooms to help people there have a voice.
 - (B) As an interpreter, Neeta Mahandru can walk out of the courtroom if she disagrees with the person she is working for.
 - (C) Neetu Mahandru was born in Great Britain, which is the main reason why she knows English so well.
 - (D) Neetu Mahandru watches a lot of TV to help her get better at translating words into English.
- 3 Overall, the article is organized around:
- (A) a place and a person
 - (B) a person and a career
 - (C) a career and an event
 - (D) a place and an event
- 4 What is the connection between the article's introduction and the final section, "Overtime"?
- (A) Both the introduction and final section provide reasons why Mahandru loves her job as an interpreter.
 - (B) The introduction explains why Mahandru decided to become an interpreter; the final section explains how she came to live in England.
 - (C) Both the introduction and final section describe Mahandru's job duties as an interpreter in a courtroom.
 - (D) The introduction describes what Mahandru's job is like; the final section describes what Mahandru's personal life is like.