

Advanced - Reading & Comprehension Check

Talking on the Phone

“Lost in Translation - Found Between Languages”

Reading

Marcus recently moved to Iowa City from Germany. His wife is a graduate student at the University of Iowa, and he is about to start his new job as a medical interpreter for the University of Iowa Hospitals & Clinics. Although he was fluent in three languages, English, German, and Spanish, he was still adjusting to the pace and expectation of professional life in the Midwest.



One morning, his supervisor asked him to call a patient to confirm an upcoming appointment. Marcus dialed the number, rehearsing the script in his head. In Spanish, he thought, “Hello, may I speak with Mrs. Rodriguez?” When, Mrs. Rodriguez picked up the phone, and he asked that question. “This is Marcus from the clinic at the Iowa Riverlanding location. I am calling to confirm your appointment for Friday at 2:00pm.” There was a pause on the phone, a moment of silence, then a cautious voice speaking in Spanish replied, “Yes...but...can you repeat that in English? My daughter helps me with appointments.”



Switching languages mid-call, Marcus continued, “Of course! Your appointment is this Friday at 2:00pm with Dr. Wagle.” The woman sounded relieved. “Thank you. I will have my daughter write it down.” Marcus smiled even though the woman could not see him over the phone. He felt grateful for the chance to help. “No problem. If you have any questions, feel free to call us back.”

After hanging up the phone, he jotted a quick note in the patient’s file and headed to the break room. His coworker, Jenna, was pouring coffee. “How did your first call go?” she asked. “Pretty well,” Marcus replied, “I had to switch languages halfway through unexpectedly, but I think she understood.”



Jenna nodded. “That happens a lot here. Some families rely on their kids to translate, especially over the phone because it is difficult to speak when you can’t see the person directly.” Marcus leaned against the counter. “It’s tricky. You can’t see facial expressions, and sometimes the connection cuts out.” Jenna laughed. “Welcome to Iowa tele-healthcare. You will get used to it. You just need more practice and to remember that no one is perfect.” Marcus sighed and then chuckled. “I already feel like I am learning more today than I did in all my training.”



Image: *University of Iowa Hospitals & Clinics. Iowa City, IA*

Questions

True or False? If False, correct the statement.

1. Marcus is from Belgium. True / False
2. Marcus' wife is a professor at the University of Iowa. True / False
3. Marcus speaks German, English, and Spanish. True / False
4. Marcus felt completely confident about his new job from the beginning.
True / False
5. Marcus' first task was to interpret during an in-person appointment.
True / False
6. Marcus rehearsed what he was going to say before calling. True / False
7. The patient said her son helps her with her appointments. True / False
8. After the call, Marcus wrote a note in the patient's file. True / False
9. Jenna is Marcus' supervisor. True / False

Free Response Questions

1. Why did Marcus move to Iowa City? What is his new job? Give as many details as possible.
2. What languages does Marcus speak? Do you speak any of these languages? What languages do you speak?
3. Why does Jenna say some families rely on their children to help with appointments? What are they worried about? Do you relate to this idea?
4. What does Jenna say to Marcus after the phone call? Is she supportive or critical of him?
5. What do you think Marcus meant when he said, "I already feel like I am learning more today than I did in all my training" at the end of the story?

Share a story

2. What was or is your first job in Iowa? What was your first job in general? Compare the two jobs. Did both jobs live up to your expectations? Describe your first day at each job or share a story similar to Marcus'.