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Abstract for Part One – Language and Migration: Experience and Memory April- May 2021

199 words excluding title

Presentation Title

Beyond language: the role of memory and experience in the presentation of asylum claims.

The 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, removed the temporal and geographical limitations of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Exclusively for Europeans until 1967, this international treaty also became applicable to non-Europeans. Since then the 1951 Convention has had a universal coverage. The language of the criteria for determining refugee status imply that a particular testimonial style is required. Consequently, those most familiar with the Western form of communication are more likely to fulfil these criteria. Credibility is the core element in the adjudication of asylum applications. Analysing data from Free Association Narrative Interviews with two Iranian asylum seekers in the UK, revealed contrasting approaches to communicating testimony. Despite being similar in every respect relevant to their asylum claims, analysis proves the importance of linguistic skills to be granted refugee status. Credibility factors in the two men's testimonials include chronology, coherence, sensory details, consistency and pre-empting areas of doubt. These factors demonstrate the significance of alignment with the host country's discourse conventions. To conclude, a model is presented to illustrate the combined linguistic and non-linguistic factors that contribute to testimonial style and, in turn, asylum outcomes. These factors are childhood memory and experience, collective memory, and pre-asylum knowledge.