

TEXT 1 — STORY

Questions 1–5

The Interpreter

The courtroom at Parramatta was a cold, high-ceilinged room that smelled of floor wax and old paper, and Linh Tran, nineteen years old and in her second year of university, had never felt so small in a space so large. She had been called at short notice. The usual interpreter was ill, and the accused, a Vietnamese grandmother named Mrs Bui, had waited three weeks for a hearing. Linh's task was simple in theory: to say, in English, exactly what Mrs Bui said in Vietnamese, and the reverse. Nothing more. Nothing less.

At first, it was manageable. The magistrate asked Mrs Bui her name and her address, and Linh relayed the answers in a clear, even voice. Then the prosecutor began to speak of a shop, a missing till and a pattern of behaviour. The words came faster, thick with legal phrases that Linh had never met. Mrs Bui listened, her hands knotted in her lap, her eyes fixed on Linh's face with a terrible, trusting intensity. Linh felt it like a weight: this woman's whole understanding of her own trial passed through her mouth.

The difficulty arrived at the cross-examination. "Did you," the barrister asked, "knowingly conceal the cash?" Mrs Bui frowned and answered at length, in a rush of Vietnamese. Linh listened, and a cold realisation spread through her. The word the grandmother had used for 'keep' could also mean 'hide'. In Vietnamese, the two ideas were close, shaded by tone and context. In English, they were opposites. If Linh said 'hide', Mrs Bui would be damned. If she said 'keep', she might be lying. Every second of silence in the court pressed against her.

She did the only thing she could. "Your Honour," she said, and her voice shook, "the interpreter requests clarification. The witness's word has two meanings in English." The magistrate frowned. The barrister sighed theatrically. But Linh explained, and Mrs Bui, prompted, spoke again, slowly this time, and the meaning emerged: she had been keeping the cash safe, as she had done for her late husband's shop for forty years. The barrister's face closed like a door. The magistrate made a brief note.

Afterwards, on the steps in the thin winter sun, Mrs Bui took Linh's hands in her own, small and dry as paper. She said something Linh did not at first catch, then understood. Thank you for not letting my words be broken. Linh nodded, unable to speak in either language. As she walked to the train, she thought about all the people for whom justice depended on a stranger's accuracy, and she realised that translation was not a matter of words at all. It was a matter of trust, held together by a person who would not look away.

1. Why had a new interpreter been called to the court?

- A The usual interpreter was late for work.
- B The magistrate had asked for a student.
- C The accused had requested Linh by name.
- D The usual interpreter was ill.

2. The simile of the barrister's face closing "like a door" suggests that the barrister

- A had lost the point and stopped arguing
- B had opened a new line of questioning
- C had welcomed the interpreter's help
- D had become friendly to the witness

3. Why did Linh stop to ask the court for clarification?

- A She was unable to follow the barrister's speech.
- B She realised a single word could change the meaning of the evidence.
- C She wanted to delay the proceedings for a time.
- D She had forgotten the Vietnamese word entirely.

THE WORKED ANSWERS TO THOSE 3 QUESTIONS

1. Why had a new interpreter been called to the court? [Detail]

Correct answer: D — The usual interpreter was ill.

- What is the question asking? It asks for a fact that the text states.
- Go back to the text and find the evidence: "The usual interpreter was ill"
- The first paragraph gives the reason.
- So the correct answer is D (The usual interpreter was ill).
- Why the other options are wrong:
 - A (The usual interpreter was late for work.): Being late is a believable reason for a replacement, but the text says something more serious: the usual interpreter was ill, which is why Linh was called at short notice.
 - B (The magistrate had asked for a student.): The magistrate does ask questions, which can make him seem in charge of the arrangements, but nothing says he requested a student. Linh was simply called when the usual interpreter fell ill.
 - C (The accused had requested Linh by name.): Mrs Bui trusts Linh completely once the hearing starts, but she never asks for her. Linh was a stand-in called at short notice, so the accused had no say in the choice.
- Check it against the evidence. Check the detail: "The usual interpreter was ill" points to 'The usual interpreter was ill', so the other choices do not fit.

LOS: EN5-RVL-01: uses a range of personal, creative and critical strategies to interpret complex texts

KEY TAKEAWAY

Go back to the text and find the exact words that answer the question, then match them to an option.

2. The simile of the barrister's face closing "like a door" suggests that the barrister [Feature]

Correct answer: A — had lost the point and stopped arguing

- What is the question asking? It asks what a language or text feature does for the reader.
- Go back to the text and find the evidence: "The barrister's face closed like a door."
- The image shows his case being shut down.
- So the correct answer is A (had lost the point and stopped arguing).

- Why the other options are wrong:
- B (had opened a new line of questioning): The barrister does begin with a pointed question, so 'new line of questioning' sounds plausible. But a face that closes like a door shuts something off; it describes losing ground, not starting again.
- C (had welcomed the interpreter's help): A door closing is the opposite of welcoming. The barrister had just sighed theatrically at the delay, and the image shows a person who has been beaten and shuts down.
- D (had become friendly to the witness): Friendliness would need a door opening. The barrister's sigh earlier shows irritation, and the closed door shows the point has been lost, so the face turns hard, not warm.
- Check it against the evidence. Think about the effect on the reader: "The barrister's face closed like a door." points to 'had lost the point and stopped arguing', so the other choices do not fit.

LOS: EN5-URA-01: analyses how meaning is created through increasingly complex language forms, features and structures

KEY TAKEAWAY

Name the feature first (simile, hyperbole, contrast, repetition), then ask what effect it has on the reader.

3. Why did Linh stop to ask the court for clarification? [Inference]

Correct answer: B — She realised a single word could change the meaning of the evidence.

- What is the question asking? It asks what the clues in the text show.
- Go back to the text and find the evidence: "The word the grandmother had used for 'keep' could also mean 'hide'."
- The ambiguity could have damned the witness.
- So the correct answer is B (She realised a single word could change the meaning of the evidence).
- Why the other options are wrong:
- A (She was unable to follow the barrister's speech.): Linh does feel overwhelmed by the legal phrases, so confusion is tempting. But she follows the question and notices that one Vietnamese word could mean 'keep' or 'hide', which is a problem of meaning, not of following.
- C (She wanted to delay the proceedings for a time.): Her pause feels like a delay, and the court does sigh at it, but her purpose is accuracy. She speaks up because 'hide' would damn Mrs Bui, not to slow the case.
- D (She had forgotten the Vietnamese word entirely.): She does not forget the word. She hears it clearly and understands that it has two English meanings; the trouble is that choosing either one could mislead the court.
- Check it against the evidence. Look for the clue: "The word the grandmother had used for 'keep' could also mean 'hide'." points to 'She realised a single word could change the meaning of the evidence', so the other choices do not fit.

LOS: EN5-RVL-01: uses a range of personal, creative and critical strategies to interpret complex texts

KEY TAKEAWAY

When the text does not say it directly, use the clues it gives, then ask: what must be true?

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