

A conceptual and contemporary approach to the evolution of impartiality in community interpreting

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the profile of the interpreter in Public Services, highlighting his/her role as a cultural mediator along with a reconsideration of the principle of impartiality in relation to this particular role. In contrast to the Codes of Ethics that have traditionally advocated for the least invasive role when interpreting, a growing number of voices have suggested that impartiality and neutrality are utopian and unachievable goals and defend a more inclusive, participatory role. Greater visibility would help both users and providers gain better understanding of the interpreter's role. One of the main challenges that educators face in the context of incorporating ethics into the curriculum is the persistent gap between theory and practice in the discipline. An approach based on empathy and critical skills should be encouraged in student training, alongside establishing realistic rules from a multi-dimensional perspective based on daily practice. The article concludes outlining six conditions that should be met to ensure the recognition and standardisation of community interpreting.

KEYWORDS

Community interpreting, intercultural communication, conflict management, mediation, impartiality, empathy.

1. Introduction

Community interpreting has been defined in many ways. According to Mikkelsen (1996: 77), the definitions range from the kind of interpreting that takes place informally in neighbourhoods and community agencies as performed by amateurs or ad hoc interpreters, to a more formal occupation involving practitioners with some training in medical, legal or social service interpreting.

In the First International Conference on Interpreting in Legal, Health and Social Service Settings that took place in Canada in 1995, community interpreting was defined as enabling "people who are not fluent speakers of the official language(s) of the country to communicate with the providers of public services so as to facilitate full and equal access to legal, health, education, government and social services" (Carr *et al.* 1997). Some scholars have argued about the negative connotations of the label itself, which, in their opinion, can lead to misunderstandings about the interpreter's role. Gentile (1997), for example, complains about the ambiguity of the term *community interpreting* and expresses his preference for *liaison interpreting* as a better way to describe the process. Moreover, he states that the continued use of the label *community interpreting* will have an adverse effect on the profession, perpetuating the *Cinderella* image that is attached to it.

Despite a number of international conventions that uphold the existence of fundamental rights, including non-discrimination on the basis of ethnicity,

and establish that interpreter and language assistance services should be provided at no cost (Laster and Taylor 1994: 74), Metin (2015) argues that in many countries, including Spain, “the regulations are not precise as to the qualifications of a competent interpreter and how qualification should be assessed,” and he admits that “the profession is left in the hands of the profession.”

Translation Studies has traditionally focused on *translation* as opposed to the *translator*, and the topic of translator status is still largely ignored (Dam and Zethsen 2008: 72). However, the topic of the interpreter role has dominated the field of community interpreting, and studies within this particular sphere “[have] traditionally centred on perceptions and expectations among users of interpreting services and interpreting practitioners” (Jacobsen 2009: 155). The explanation for this focus arises from the debate about visibility of the interpreter, his/ her presence at the speech event and the fact that, although the “official role was that of a passive participant,” community interpreters are frequently active participants (Lang 1978: 241).

2. Comparative assessment of interpreting roles

There is an ongoing debate about the most suitable role for the community interpreter to play to ensure best practice. The complexity of community interpreting has led to opposing views of the interpreters. On one hand, they can be seen as a *verbatim* reproducer of messages in another language, remaining neutral, invisible, a *non-person* (Goffman 1981; Berk-Seligson 1990); and, on the other hand, the interpreter actively manages the communication as a cultural mediator, rendering services of “advocacy,” “cultural brokering” (Giovanini 1992) or “conciliation” (Merlini and Favaron 2003: 212). As Jiang (2007: 2) states, “there is neither consensus on the interpreter’s role in an actual interpreted-mediated setting nor a consensus on which communicative parameters determine the individual interpreter’s role within those two opposite views in a concrete interpreting scenario.”

As it has been already pointed out, defining the interpreter’s role appears to be a major, if not the dominant, line of contemporary interpreting studies research (Springer 2000: 12). It occupies the attention not only of scholars, but also of the interpreters themselves, as Roy (2002: 347) recognises: “interpreters don’t have a problem with ethics, they have a problem with the role.” According to Pöchhacker and Schlesinger (2005: 162), it could even be regarded as “the most widely discussed topic and the most controversial one” in the field. The main question underlying this research is to which extent it is legitimate for an interpreter to interact and mediate. The four main roles of the community interpreter are outlined as: *the conduit or linguistic role*, *the communicator-facilitator or clarifier*, *the bilingual-bicultural mediator or cultural broker* and *the advocate or helper role* (Roy 2002). These four roles are ranked by the increasing degree of involvement and responsibilities assigned to the interpreter (incremental

intervention), and therefore his/her degree of *visibility*. The interpreter's participation is minimal in the role of conduit and maximal in the role of advocate.

On the basis of these roles, Avery (2001: 10) identifies three categories or models of interpreting:

a) The conduit model, based on the assumption of a neutral interpreter.

This model would range from the most basic, neutral role, assuming that the only function of the interpreter is to serve as a 'conduit' for transmitting a message, to a slightly more active role of the linguistic or communication-facilitator, for example checking that the client is truly understanding what is being said. Both roles can be considered to be part of the same model of interpreting because, despite minor changes in terms of language attitudes and expectations of interpreters' linguistic expertise, the communication facilitator role doesn't differ significantly from the 'machine' version. In this sense, Roy (2002: 350) refers to it as "the conduit notion in the disguise of communication-facilitator". According to Calle-Alberdi (2015: 17), "the conduit model has had the highest impact on practitioners' understanding of the profession" and many publications have examined its nature and application. For Roy (2002: 347), these metaphors (*machine, telephone, bridge*, among others) "clearly try to convey the difficulty of [...] interpreting while reminding everyone that the interpreters is uninvolved on any other level."

b) The active interpreter working as a cultural mediator or broker, who manages cross-cultural/ cross-language communication.

The cultural broker model represents a much more participative role and enhances the condition of the interpreter as cultural expert who detects cultural misunderstandings and provides the necessary cultural framework to resolve any misunderstanding.

c) The interpreter embedded in their own cultural-linguistic community.

This is the most active role an interpreter can assume and a model not without controversy, regarding the degree to which an interpreter should become involved. This model includes the advocacy role or interpreter cultural mediator (ICM), and is generally associated with a lack of impartiality (in Martin and Phelan 2010: 16).

The role of helper or advocate for the individual client was typical of early sign language interpreters (Pöchhacker 2004: 152). Employed either by the government or working as freelancers, community interpreters working in institutions (hospitals, social security offices, courts, etc.) have been recognised and even often been considered advocates who go beyond the traditional neutral role of the interpreter (Roberts 1997, in Moody 2001: 39).

In Moody's opinion (2011: 39) a 'faithful' interpretation [should be] the result of being faithful to the goals and values of the community, in other

words, being helpful to people who [are] trying to communicate. This greater involvement of the interpreter highlights cultural expertise as his/her biggest contribution, even beyond linguistic competence. Jackson-Carroll *et al.* (1998: 30) defend this perspective as the most suitable one for Healthcare interpreting, and argue that the interpreter cultural mediator should work to her own judgement in each case.

According to Kaufert *et al.* (2009: 239), this model is based on the experience of interpreters “recruited from small, tightly integrated cultural communities and who continue to maintain their ties with their own community.” In this sense, Avery (2001: 11) states that “the interpreter has to have credibility as a member of the community in order to have credibility as an interpreter.” Dysart-Gayle objects to the way that in such a model the interpreter frequently is required to take extra responsibilities beyond their competency:

Interacting with or on behalf of patients [...] compromises confidentiality and invariably leads to patient requests for advice, recommendations, clarifications, and other actions that will put the interpreter in the position of what informants frequently referred to as practicing medicine without a licence (Dysart-Gayle 2007: 240).

Rudvin (2006), for her part, makes the distinction between “language” and “cultural” mediators, and highlights an important function of the cultural mediator that seems to be overlooked by many of those who regard the conduit role as the only admissible one: the facilitation of migrant integration when facilitating interaction with the national institutions. Should this way of acting be considered partial, unprofessional and even intrusive? Traditionally, the concept of neutrality has only been taken for granted in the conduit model, where the interpreter restricts her activities to interpreting. From this perspective, the more the interpreter gets involved in the interaction, the less objective he or she is likely to be. Nevertheless, the new perspectives in Interpreting Studies seem to increasingly reject this idea and highlight the need to revisit this equation for reasons of being aprioristic and prescriptive, not taking into account the complexity of the interpreting task and disregarding the importance of cultural mediation in community interpreting. Bancroft (2015: 14) makes an interesting remark, stating that, although some countries adopt formal guidelines dictating interpreting practice, on the ground, most community interpreters make decisions about their role “nearly by instinct,” depending on their training, market pressures, emotional expectations brought to bear, the influence of their cultural communities and their personal values. From a multi-dimensional perspective, interpreter can switch roles in the middle of an assignment, depending on the circumstances and the expectations of the consumers, and this includes the advocacy role.

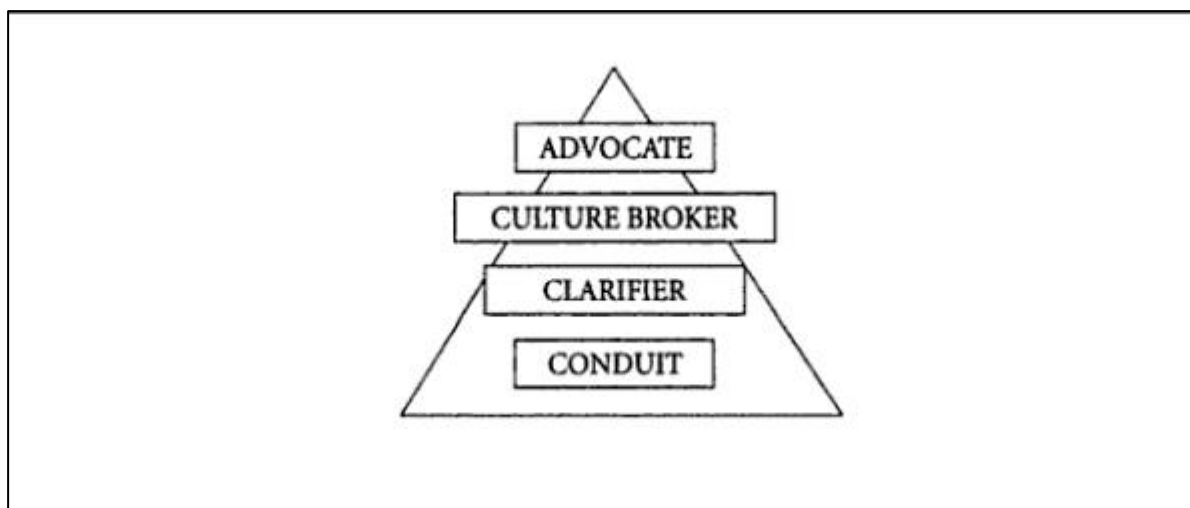


Figure 1. Niska's Role Pyramid (2002)

According to Niska's (2002: 137-138) role pyramid (see Figure 1.), the community interpreter spends most of his/her time fulfilling the role of conduit, but it may sometimes be necessary to move within a spectrum of possibilities for the role (clarifier, cultural broker and advocate, each role increasingly more involve and participative), depending on the situation. As Kotzé (2014: 135) points out, the underlying principle of Niska's (2002) model is that interpreters fulfil more than one role and, more importantly, do so simultaneously. The value of this model lies in the fact that interpreters are no longer bound to only one role, and may choose which role is more fitting in a specific environment and situation.

Obviously, it cannot be denied that the more participative the intervention of the interpreter is, the more the boundaries between professionalism and interference become blurred. Kaufert *et al.* (2009: 239) underscore that "cultural mediation is not without risk and its critics have questioned the implications of this model for ethical practice and the maintenance of professional competence."

As we will see below, despite the evolution in the empowerment of the interpreter, there is still a lack of consensus about where the boundaries of his/her involvement should lie. The lack of fixed parameters and their variance make it difficult to determine a unique way of acting, mainly due to the fact that interpreting is not a single invariant phenomenon, and it takes different forms in different contexts. As Wadensjö highlights, "in practice, there are no absolute and unambiguous criteria for defining a mode of interpreting which would be 'good' across the board." Different activity types with different goal structures, as well as the different concerns, needs, desires and commitments of primary parties, imply various demands on the interpreters (Wadensjö 1998: 287).

Jiang shares this opinion and recognises that, "while it may be true that a general Code of Conduct establishes rules of conduct on a collective basis,

in an actual situation the individual interpreter is often at a loss as to how involved he/she should become" (Jiang 2007: 2).

However, there seems to be a general consensus about the fact that the interpreter's task goes beyond mere linguistic transfer and that the traditional conduit model appears to be inadequate since "it overlooks too many aspects involved in the process of meaning determination" (Springer 2000: 17). In this sense, as Niska (2002: 137-138) recognises, the role fulfilled by the community interpreter can only be fully understood if it is accepted that a spectrum of role options is available.

3. Overview of the traditional standards of practice

In Australia, accreditation of community interpreters has existed since 1977. This accreditation is provided by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), which established a code of ethics that was completed in 1995, and is required by applicants for this accreditation and recognition. Such guidelines and ethical standards profess to be mandatory and are described as "a compilation of rules and directives that interpreters and translators in Australia must follow while performing their duties" (NAATI 2013: 2). The conduit model, the least participative possible role, is the one that appears to prevail. The clause on impartiality states that "interpreters are not responsible for what clients say, and should not voice their opinion or anything concerned with an assignment." The clause on accuracy, for its part, states that "an interpreter is to relay accurately all that is said during the meeting without altering, adding or omitting anything" (NAATI 2013: 5). Because of these clauses, the Code establishes the following:

The interpreter must not improve on the coherence of the replies by making them more articulate than they are in the original. Whatever the client says must be interpreted, even if such a client's response bears no relation to the question or makes no sense. (NAATI 2013).

As far as the clarity of role boundaries is concerned, the Australian Code of Ethics states that the focus of interpreters and translators should only be on message transfer. According to these standards of practice, interpreters and translators do not, in the course of their interpreting or translation duties, assume other roles such as offering advocacy, guidance or advice. Even where such other tasks are mandated (e.g. by specific institutional requirements for employees), practitioners insist that a clear demarcation is agreed on by all parties between interpreting and translating and other tasks. For this purpose, interpreters and translators will, where the situation requires it, provide an explanation of their role in line with the principles of this Code (In NAATI Code of Ethics and Conduct, Reviewed version from 2012).

Canada is another noteworthy example of a country that has reached the common goal of professionalising community interpreting. In this country, the development of the National Standard Guide for Community Interpreting in 2007 was an initiative of the Healthcare Interpretation Network Policy Committee (HIN), founded in 1990 to promote awareness of the profession and to develop standards to guide the training of language interpreters in the healthcare sector. As was the case for the Codes of Conduct in Australia and the UK, the Canadian Standards of Practice state that “Interpreters strive to perform their professional duties within their prescribed role and refrain from personal involvement” (HIN, 2007: 27). The interpreter must “perform her or his duties as unobtrusively as possible” (HIN 2007: 29) and avoid “unnecessary contact with the parties” (HIN 2007: 27). From this point of view, he or she should “not enter in the discussion or show reactions to any of the parties [...], does not mediate, give advice or express any personal opinion” (*ibid.*).

In Australia and the United Kingdom, the National Codes of Conduct establish that the interpreter always interprets in the first person (DPSI 2014, *List of fatal errors*; and NAATI 2013: 14). The Canadian Standards of Practice in the National Standard Guide establish that “the interpreter renders all utterances and written communication faithfully using the same grammatical person as the speaker or writer.” Such directives are good examples of the invisibility that has traditionally been demanded from the interpreter in the Codes of Ethics and Conduct. Leaving aside the debate about the functionality of these norms, the status of community interpreting in these countries proves that the consolidation of any discipline requires a norm setting authority which establishes the groundwork for determining standards in training, credentialing, regulation and professional practice.

4. Norms and professional practice

Despite the evolution in the direction of a more “involved” role model, Kotzé (2014: 127) admits that the Code Model which states that the interpreter should remain as invisible and uninvolved as possible in the communicative act “still enjoys great normative support” as the “correct” role to be accepted by interpreters. In fact, it is not by chance that “those of them who stay within the conduit role tend to label themselves ‘professional interpreters’ (Bancroft 2015: 14). The influence of inculcated training on the interpreter’s attitude and on the dynamics of the interaction can be observed in the use of the first or third person when interpreting, and its subsequent repercussion for the invisibility of the interpreter. The results of an empirical study carried out by Valero-Garcés about hospital interpreting practice showed that trained interpreters assumed an impartial role and were more likely to use the first person (the *non-person* approach), whereas untrained interpreters more frequently used the third person – ‘tell her,’ ‘ask her,’ ‘she says,’ etc.- (Valero-Garcés 2008: 173-174), the same deictic reference that any speaker would use in a monolingual conversation to refer to others.

Moore's research, for its part, concluded that the use of first person interpreting remains the preferred option for "a majority of professional interpreters" (2007: 76), since it makes them "look more professional," which is also an indicative of the influence of codes of ethics and role metaphors – the invisible interpreter – on interpreters' training. The results suggest a correlation between the degree of regulation/normalisation in the interpreting profession, inculcated to the interpreter through training, and the degree of involvement of the interpreter.

Likewise, Bancroft (2015) outlines that interpreters' roles tend to differ between countries. For example, professional interpreters in the U.K., Sweden and Canada are primarily expected to restrict their role to interpreting, while in several countries like Belgium, healthcare interpreters called intercultural mediators are permitted to 'help out' the patient or service user as needed. In other nations, like the U.S., community interpreters sit in the middle of the spectrum: they may do more than interpret but are taught ethical restrictions on the 'helper' role. Finally, in still other countries, such as Spain, Italy, Germany and Switzerland, the two professions of community interpreting and (inter)cultural mediation exist side by side, with interpreters restricting their work primarily to interpreting while an intercultural mediator may both interpret and 'help out' the service user.

Baraldi (2014: 18) seems to support this idea and states that "while professional interpreting is important in public services in Anglophone and Northern European countries, in some other countries, including Italy [or Spain], intercultural mediation services have developed."

Ortega and Foulquié (2008: 129) point out that in countries where there isn't a fixed, standardised protocol, as in Spain, interpreters' attitudes to their work are based primarily on their intuition, their own training and personal experience, without resort to pre-established protocols that, at the end of the day, do not prevail in the labour market. This could also be motivated by the fact that interlocutors, being more accustomed to ad hoc interpreters rather than to professionals following a fixed, established protocol, see the interpreter as an accompanying person or someone with competence in the foreign language and willing to lend a hand, so they themselves often address the interpreter, instead of addressing the other party directly, using formulas such as 'tell him/ her' or 'ask him/her' (Ortega and Foulquié 2008: 135).

Calle-Alberdi's research (2015:61) concluded that Spanish interpreters "use the term 'common sense' to refer to and legitimise decisions that tend to be liberal [...] and contradict the deontological approach to ethics." In situations as complex as those involved in community interpreting, context inevitably enters the discussion and, as Baker and Maier (2011:10) state, "one then finds oneself responding with expressions such as 'it depends'

when queried about appropriate professional conduct,” a response that “has long been recognised as unsatisfactory by students and instructors alike.” The lack of consensus about the interpreter’s role may also have a detrimental impact on the client-professional relationship; for example, interpreters are often seen as ‘social workers in disguise’, an ill-defined status that conditions the expectations of the other parties about the interpreter’s boundaries and, consciously or unconsciously, shapes the interpreting performance.

Closer and more coordinated work between interpreter training institutions and public service providers appears necessary to avoid misunderstandings or misleading expectations about appropriate workplace conduct policy, and patterns of professional practice must be settled with the agreement and understanding of both public service providers and users.

5. A gap between theory and practice

A gap seems to exist between real life practices and standards of behaviour on paper, which an increasing number of researchers and interpreters consider so limiting that they oblige the interpreter to ‘step out’ of role. For example, a risk of miscommunication due to distinct cultural perspectives may recommend a shift into the third person style and trigger the interpreter’s involvement; it may also be a decision adopted in a certain moment to increase users’ cooperation, since it would be more natural for them that way.

Valero-Garcés (2008: 176) described the use of the first or third person as “a never-ending debate”. Over two decades ago, González *et al.* (1991) had already referred to the use of the first or third person – and the subsequent repercussions for the invisibility of the interpreter as “one of the most widely discussed issues in the field of public service interpreting.”

In Ng’s opinion, the requirement for the interpreter to assume the voice of the source speaker “necessarily means that interpreters have to play two roles at the same time, as both powerful and non-powerful participants” (Ng 2013: 262). Her research included an empirical study about Hong Kong court interpreters which demonstrated that these courtroom interpreters commonly interpreted from English in the third person and into English in the first person. For the author, this practice has more to do with the power asymmetry in the hierarchical setting of the adversarial courtroom than with any pragmatic consideration:

It is the interpreter’s consciousness of this power differential between the legal professionals and the lay-participants in the judicial process that leads them to shy away from assuming the voice of the powerful participants (Ng 2013, p. 264).

Cheng (2012, in Ng 2013: 263), for example, suggests that the use of the reported speech by court interpreters “enhances the illocutionary force of

the interpreted utterances and indicates to the addressee that the accusation comes from a party with authority and thus deserves his/her serious attention"; on the other hand, it has also the strategic function of "neutralising" the accusation and making it less confrontational or face-threatening.

The choice of the third person when interpreting can be also a way for the interpreter to deny responsibility for the accusation. It has also the advantage of avoiding confusion by clearly identifying the interpreter. In any way, as Ng recognises (2013: 264), the shift of interpreting styles unquestionably has a potential impact on the neutrality of the interpreter and on the illocutionary force of the speech act.

The dichotomy between theory and practice is also a consequence of the setting of interpreting and users' expectations about the interpreter's performance. A study conducted by Angelelli (2004) showed that the perceptions that interpreters have about their role varies, along a visibility/invisibility continuum, according to the setting in which they work. The study revealed, for example, that medical interpreters perceived themselves as more visible than court or conference interpreters and that settings in which interpreters work place constraints on their behaviour and practices.

Along the same lines, a survey carried out by Pöchhacker (2000) about the expectations of interpreters and service providers in Vienna hospitals and family affairs centres regarding the interpreter's role, showed that the demands of service providers on the interpreters in medical settings are much higher than "just translating". Interpreters are expected to take over coordinating tasks such as asking parties to clarify when statements are not comprehensible or pointing to misunderstandings. Moreover, they are expected to "adapt their utterances to clients' communicative needs and abridge circumlocutory utterances by clients" (Pöchhacker 2000: 49-63).

Furthermore, Angelelli's study showed that interpreters in all settings perceived themselves as having some degree of visibility. In the author's opinion (2004: 82), to some extent (sometimes greater, sometimes lesser), interpreters perceived that they play a role in building trust, facilitating mutual respect, communicating affect as well as message, explaining cultural gaps, controlling the communication flow, and/or aligning with one of the parties to the interaction in which they participate.

Culture clearly plays an important role, for example, in the perception of health, affecting both medical logic and communication patterns. Considering interpretation as a mere language-switching would imply assuming that words exist independently from the sociocultural context where they are said, an idea strongly rejected by Translation and Interpreting Studies, which would have long time ago meant the end of translator and interpreters in flesh and blood and their replacement by machine translators.

Garzone and Rudvin (2003: 17), among others, have highlighted the importance of going beyond the language barrier and taking other

conditioning factors into consideration, such as interpersonal sensitivity or intercultural nuance, at least as much as language and terminology skills, or competence in interpreting techniques. In Bahadir's opinion (2001: 4), research on community interpreting has provided "an empirical basis for the impossibility for interpreters to be *nonpersons*, very simply due to their being physically there". The interpreter's invisibility is also rejected by Hale (2007: 105), who considers it to be an unachievable goal, an impossible ideal "which does not reflect the performance of real-life practitioners."

The traditional models of interpreting that asked the interpreter to become invisible fail in the very first principle of successful communication, that is, to develop trust among all the interlocutors. As Llewellyn-Jones and Lee point out (2014: 9), "many of the 'dos and don'ts' of the prescriptive/proscriptive codes merely serve to inhibit interactions;" the authors claim that the machine model causes confusion amongst the participants, who "read the interpreter's failure to engage not as a sign of formality or professionalism, but as a lack of interest in what they were saying" (Wadensjö 1998, in Llewellyn-Jones and Lee 2014: 27). There is a strong, recent trend towards a more flexible and contextualised perspective, and several studies have shown that, in many cases, interpreters defend a more inclusive, participatory role, taking on responsibilities which they consider appropriate (e.g. McIntire and Sanderson 1995, Hale 2007, Martin and Abril 2008). Most of the codes of best practice share the same ethical principles, and these are essentially confidentiality, accuracy, impartiality and neutrality, and the last two are the ones that have been mostly challenged in recent ethnographic research. Roy (2002: 347) makes the point that, while descriptions and standards of ethical practice "extensively, sometimes exhaustively, list what interpreters should not do, they seldom, if ever, explain what interpreters can do, that is, explain what 'flexible' means." Consequently, "no one really knows where to draw the line on the involvement of the interpreter."

The debate about the interpreter's role as full participant in the interaction has been raised almost ever since the first codes of conduct were established, with scholars questioning the passive role imposed on the interpreter. Roberts (1997: 10-15) drew attention to this trend, and points out that "a brief perusal of the views expressed over the past decade by different authors shows a continuum ranging from absolute neutrality/invisibility to direct involvement as conciliator, with intermediate positions being variously referred to as active participation, assistance, cultural brokering and advocacy" (in Merlini and Favaron 2003: 208).

Martin and Abril's study exploring Spanish interpreters' perception of their role and specifically the limits of that role with regard to aspects such as cultural explanations, additions and omissions of information or the relations with the clients, led to an interesting conclusion concerning empathy: when asked whether they felt that their empathy with non-Spanish speakers may influence their performance as interpreters, 62%

answered 'Yes' or 'Maybe,' a higher rate than expected and leading the authors to conclude that the majority of interpreters do not adhere to traditional prescriptions and go beyond the functions that most codes of ethics stipulate and shape their role according to intuition. In the authors' opinion, "recognizing the influence of factors which compromise one's own neutrality signifies that one is practically recognizing a higher level of intervention than would correspond to a totally impartial interpreter" (Martin and Abril 2008: 223).

Llewellyn-Jones and Lee (2014) also question the traditional notion of role that is so often taught on interpreter education courses and, more often than not, prescribed by the codes of Ethics and Conduct published by institutional users and providers of interpreting services. The authors propose a "role-space" model that treats all interactions as unique and gives the interpreter freedom to make appropriate professional decisions based on the reality of the interaction they are interpreting. In the authors' view, the important point is that the interpreter's behaviours "shouldn't be so unexpected or intrusive that they distract the interlocutors and have detrimental effect on the interaction" (Llewellyn-Jones and Lee 2014: 140). The role-space model proposed by Llewellyn-Jones and Lee is particularly interesting because of its dynamic, reasoned, multi-dimensional and negotiable perspective. However, it is difficult to draw the line between the involvement of the interpreter and when positive advocacy and cultural mediation turn into an intrusive role, with the interpreter taking extra responsibilities beyond their competency. In this sense, we agree with the authors that the principle that should regulate the interpreter's behaviour and ensures that he or she always acts professionally is, above all, *professional integrity*.

6. Conclusions

Research and practice have redefined traditional interpreting roles in the interests of producing more effective communication. The lack of compulsory training for interpreters emphasises the need for professional standards to underpin the ethical performance of community interpreters, and the code of ethics has become, as Hale (2007: 103) states, "the only consistent standard."

The new paradigm in interpreting studies has drawn upon the semiotics of the human body to reconceptualise the role of interpreters; while it recognises that (professional) interpreters remain largely constrained by predetermined roles, it also acknowledges, as Perez (2014: 124) points out that "para-verbal and non-verbal aspects of institutional talk [...] prompt changes in the participants' alignment with one another and facilitate the mutual recognition of their changing role as interlocutors or simple onlookers." However, research on community interpreting has largely been normative with regards to how interpreters *should* perform. With the growth of the profession, perspectives on this subject have evolved to go further

and take a descriptive rather than a prescriptive approach that takes into account the experiences of the interpreter during daily practice. Research on community interpreting should refrain from dictating a set of rules that determine what is *right* or *wrong* in the interpreter's performance. Along with this view, this article has defended the idea that an interpreter's behaviour can only be analysed from a multi-dimensional perspective that recognises the interpreter's presence whilst defining the limits of intervention.

Clearly the interpreter must preserve some boundaries in the course of her work, and follow principles that will allow determination of whether a particular behaviour is appropriate or not. That said, interpreting being a human activity, it is utopia to believe that an interpreter can remain wholly neutral, and nonsensical to ask him or her to become an invisible, communicative tool that, as mentioned before, inhibits (rather than facilitates) interaction amongst participants. In this sense, Metzger (1999: 1) states that "in discussions of the issue of interpreter neutrality, the anecdotes that interpreters and lay people share suggest that the traditional perception of the interpreter's role as a neutral conduit of language is at odds with people's real-life experiences."

Assuming that community interpreting cannot be considered without leaving out the variety of contexts in which it takes place, as well as the influence of personal beliefs and social factors that help to define the interpreter, many authors today vigorously defend the position that the role of the interpreter cannot be separated from that of the cultural mediator in order to guarantee more effective communication, and in this sense we believe empathy is one of the basic skills of successful cross cultural communication and the best tool to serve the interests of interpreters.

It is hoped that this new perspective will be more realistic; however, the interpreter's work cannot be carried out by instinct and needs to be flexibly standardised in order to practise non-intrusive cultural mediation and to avoid the risk of over-intrusion and, possibly worse, errors of judgement or even influence over decision-making by interlocutors. In this sense, we agree with Bancroft's opinion (2015) about the importance of finding a middle ground between the strict message transfer role and the overly liberal helper role, where the interpreter becomes the faithful voice of all participants while effectively – but not intrusively – pointing out communication barriers as they emerge, "not speaking on behalf of anyone but enabling people to speak for themselves". Moreover, by using mediation "not as a way to give advice or incorrect cultural information but as a means to give participants a full voice", the interpreter "can let the participants become fully responsible for their own decisions, relieving the interpreter of this weighty responsibility and liability" (Bancroft 2015: 226).

The approach to interpreting, both in research and training, should be descriptive, as prescriptive rules are unnatural and tend to make the

interaction seem less realistic, and therefore, less successful. Also, the fact that certain behaviour has proven to be effective does not necessarily mean it is the only appropriate behaviour.

In this sense, we support Angelelli's integrative theory of interpreting, which, instead of being based in a prescriptive ideal model, is based on a descriptive approach to the interpreter's role and establishes realistic rules based on the features of an interaction and the social context in which it is embedded. Angelelli (2004: 89) considers the interpreter as a visible individual who has agency in the interaction and is capable of exercising power and/or solidarity, in other words, who is capable of either maintaining or altering the status quo.

For the traditional approach of community interpreting, giving the interpreter more visibility and, therefore, more responsibilities during the interaction was regarded as intrusive and questionable. However, we are now seeing the legitimacy of those principles being undermined. Instead, there is a move away to a more involved role of the interpreter, changing the pattern from a mere word-translation machine to a cultural mediator that permits the participants to interact on an equal basis with others, and defending *objectivity* rather than *impartiality*.

On the other hand, a more active role for the interpreter demands formal, specialised training, alongside deeper research on methodological aspects that need to be considered, not only to improve the consistency of practice, but also to provide the field with the kind of status, consolidation and professionalisation that characterise more traditionally valued forms of interpretation, such as conference interpreting, even though community interpreting has been practised for decades. As Mikkelsen (1999: 9) highlights, the fact that many individuals who are called upon to interpret in certain settings lack professional interpreting skills "does not mean they are not needed; it simply means that the client requesting interpreting services does not appreciate their importance." In such a situation, practitioners have little incentive to obtain specialised training.

The professionalisation of community interpreting may also help to end the very common practice in many countries, including Spain, of using available bilinguals as ad hoc interpreters, with no specific training. As Toledano (2010: 12) states, "non-professionalised interpreting is 'the norm', [and] a great many of de facto interpreting problems arise from the 'normalisation' of a lack of norms, (...)". Therefore, establishing a set of norms for community interpreting is essential in order to guarantee professionalism and quality performance. The author argues that a lack of specific interpreting norms legitimises de-professionalisation and the practise of the profession without adequate training. In return, "normalising the discipline, [i.e.] subjecting it to norms, will guarantee professionalism and [...] the consolidation of the discipline" (*ibid.* 20).

Standardisation and the recognition of community interpreting will be achieved through education, legislation and public relations, and for that, six conditions should be met (Roberts, 1994: 133-136): 1) Clarification of terminology; 2) clarification of the role(s) of the community interpreter; 3) provision of training for community interpreters; 4) provision of training for trainers of community interpreters; 5) provision of training for professionals working with interpreters; and 6) accreditation of community interpreters. On the other hand, as Baker and Maier state (2011: 7) and has been emphasised in this article, “one of the potential challenges that educators face in the context of incorporating ethics into the curriculum is the *persistent gap between theory and practice* in the discipline” (emphasis in original). As defended by Wadensjö (1998: 195), with training interpreters can gain greater insight into the dynamics of the conversational participation framework, develop awareness of self-monitoring and self-assessment, and the necessary flexibility in shifting from one participation status to another in relation to what is heard and said. However, for norms to be operational there must be ‘negotiation’ of situations and identities, rather than unquestionable, imposed regulations; norms need to be realistic and outcomes-focused, and always rely on the interpreter’s judgment and professional autonomy.

Finally, public services staff should be educated about the cultural issues surrounding foreign users instead of this being considered an external element. Increased collaboration and coordination between interpreters and public services providers is needed, and this can only happen with the support of the authorities.

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Biography

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