Community Interpreting Today and Tomorrow

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Introduction

Community interpreting is the oldest "type" of interpreting in the world. While conference interpreting only came to the fore in the first half of the 20th century, and while official court interpreting is primarily a phenomenon of the second half of this century, community interpreting has been around since the first encounter between different linguistic groups.

The earliest recorded incident related to community interpreting in Canada, a relatively young country, took place in 1534 (Delisle, 1977: 5-14). That was the year when the French explorer Jacques Cartier kidnapped two Iroquois, took them to France to learn French and sent them back eight months later to act as interpreters in exchanges between the Iroquois and the French. However, they remained loyal to their Iroquois brothers and never collaborated with the French when there was a conflict of interest between the two groups. At the beginning of the 17th century, when the French returned to North America with the plan of establishing permanent trading posts, they needed to communicate with a number of Indian tribes to persuade the latter to trade pelts with them. To this end, they used French resident-interpreters such as Étienne Brûlé and Jean Nicolet, who adopted the Indian lifestyle and acted not only as linguistic intermediaries, but also as commercial agents, diplomats and guides. Thus began the tradition of community interpreting in North America, a practice that has persisted throughout the centuries, as new linguistic groups sought refuge on the new continent.

The two historical examples of community interpreting in Canada illustrate well certain questions that are still unresolved today. (1) What exactly

does community interpreting cover? (2) What are the different philosophical approaches to community interpreting and how do they influence the tasks of the community interpreter? (3) Are the methods of selecting, training and using community interpreters less *ad hoc* today? (4) Where is the profession heading? Are its goals and objectives for tomorrow any clearer than they were in the past? These questions, which I have addressed to some extent in translators' congresses in 1993 and 1994 (Roberts, 1993: 239-252; Roberts, 1994: 127-138), will set the stage for discussions during this First International Conference on Interpreting in Legal, Health and Social Settings.

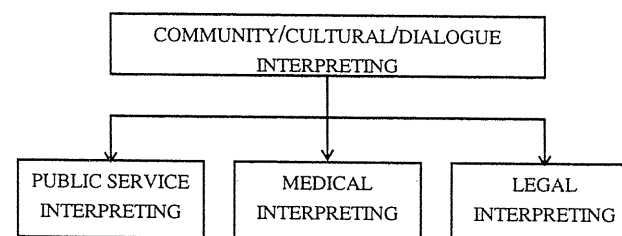## Scope of Community Interpreting

The fact that the scope of community interpreting is ill-defined is clearly illustrated by the numerous designations used to describe this still nebulous concept: community interpreting, public service interpreting, cultural interpreting, dialogue interpreting, *ad hoc* interpreting, liaison interpreting, escort interpreting, and medical or legal interpreting, to name just a few. What all these terms have in common is the fact that they are all used for interpreting in a setting other than a conference. However, they are by no means exact synonyms.

Community Interpreting: A Type of Ad Hoc Interpreting

The term "*ad hoc* interpreting" seems to be the most generic in nature. "It can be broadly divided into business oriented and community oriented" (*The Linguist*, 1990: 94), according to the nature of the interpreted dialogue or the interpreting setting. The terms "liaison interpreting" and "escort interpreting" are generally reserved for business-oriented *ad hoc* interpreting, i.e. the "type of interpreting done when accompanying visitors, diplomats and businessmen to meetings and negotiations" (Harris, 1983: 5), whereas the terms "community interpreting," "cultural interpreting," "dialogue interpreting" and, of course, "public service interpreting," "medical interpreting" and "legal interpreting" appear to be restricted to community-oriented *ad hoc* interpreting, i.e. the "type of interpreting done to assist those immigrants who are not native speakers of the language to gain full and equal access to statutory services (legal, health, education, local government, social services)" (Collard-Abbas, 1989: 81). This paper is limited to the latter type of *ad hoc* interpreting, which I will call "community interpreting" for lack of a better term.

Varieties of Community Interpreting

The scope of community interpreting, however, as defined above is still a matter of debate. This, again, is reflected by its terminology. While "community interpreting," "cultural interpreting" and "dialogue interpreting" place no restrictions on the interpreting setting, the terms "public service interpreting," "medical interpreting" and "legal interpreting" clearly limit interpreting to a given setting (local government, health and legal, respectively). This can be interpreted as meaning that community interpreting (or cultural interpreting or dialogue interpreting) is itself generic, with at least three specific forms specified by setting:

However, there is no consensus on the fact that legal interpreting belongs within community interpreting. Legal interpreting is often associated with court interpreting. And, while in many countries such as the United Kingdom, it seems to be the norm to have community interpreters working in the courtroom, this is not the case in North America, where a strict distinction is often maintained between court interpreters who are "accredited" by the courts and community interpreters. However, as most court interpreting accreditation tests are not available in the more exotic languages, community interpreters with rare languages are nevertheless called upon to work occasionally in the courtroom. This point of overlap between court interpreting and community interpreting may well prove to be a source of problems because of existing philosophical differences in the approach to court interpreting and to community interpreting.

And, while one may claim that community legal interpreting could be restricted to more "informal" legal settings including correctional services, administrative tribunals and lawyers' offices, it is hard to draw the line between formal and informal legal settings and the type and quality of interpreting required in each of them. The confusion between court interpreting and (legal) community interpreting was clearly revealed recently when a court interpreter

training programme was considering giving to borderline cases a certificate in community interpreting rather than its usual court interpreting certificate!

If legal interpreting seems to be developing as a field somewhat distinct from community interpreting, the same may soon be true of medical interpreting (including mental health interpreting). The importance of quality interpreting in medical settings has increased the number of interpreting assignments in the field of health care, and has even led to the creation of some full-time interpreter positions in hospitals. This has led to the development of a few medical interpreter training programmes, which, in many cases, are distinct from community interpreter training programmes.

If legal and medical interpreting are, thus, gradually removed from the scope of community interpreting, the latter will be left only with public service interpreting (i.e. interpreting in the social service sector)! In that case, one could well ask the question raised indirectly by Adolfo Gentile at the 1993 FIT congress (Gentile, 1993: 257): is there really any need to establish a separate category of interpreting called "community interpreting?"

Philosophical Approaches to Community Interpreting

A valid reason to distinguish between community interpreting and other types of interpreting would be a difference in philosophical approach. And at first sight there would appear to be significant differences from this point of view.

Active Participation

While interpreting is generally seen as relaying a message from one language to another and interpreters are often described as non-involved "conduits" (Roy, 1990: 81), such views are challenged by some engaged in interpreting in face-to-face settings with a small number of participants.

In such settings, according to Roy, the two primary participants are not only active speakers, but also active listeners; moreover, the two primary speakers present their ideas not only using different languages, but also using different automatic and unconscious conventions associated with their language (openings, closings, turn-taking, signalling understanding or lack thereof). As the two primary participants do not know each other's language and language use conventions, the only person who can logically maintain, adjust, and if necessary repair problems in communication is the interpreter. This means that the

interpreter is an active, third participant in the communication event, with the potential to influence both the direction and the outcome of the event. According to Roy (1990: 85),

> if interpreters are resolving overlap, offering turns, and taking turns [through their knowledge of the linguistic system, the social situation, and how each participant used language to say what they meant], they are active at a level of participation beyond that of the simplistic conduit metaphor receiving information, changing its form to another language and producing the target form.

The same idea is brought out by Wadensjö's case studies, which show that dialogue interpreting involves both relaying and coordinating talk (Wadensjö, 1992: 69-169).

Community interpreting, which involves dialogic contexts, is, therefore, generally considered to be more interpersonal than other types of interpreting, which are seen as more mechanical.

Assistance

From the notion of interpersonal relations to that of assistance is only a short step. Indeed, definitions of community interpreting often contain the words "assistance" or "service." For instance, in the context of this conference, community interpreting has been described as "a type of interpreting done to assist those who are not fluent speakers of the official language of the country, to gain full and equal access to public services (legal, health, education, local government and social services)." And Cecilia Wadensjö (1992: 48) describes the dialogue interpreter, who, she acknowledges, is similar to the community interpreter, as someone "who works in institutional settings...where she provides *service* for laymen and representatives of social organizations when these are not able to communicate in a common language."

One may, of course, argue that any type of interpreting "assists" the parties involved. However, it is significant that the definitions of most other types of interpreting generally do not include the term "assist." For example, conference interpreting is defined neutrally as the "oral rendering into one of the conference languages of speeches made by delegates or participants at a meeting" (Denis, 1968: 83), and even the definition of liaison interpreting, in the sense of business-oriented interpreting, does not contain a hint of "assistance." But, as indicated above, many, if not most, definitions of community interpreting explicitly include the concept of "assistance" or "service." And Gehrke (1993:

420) goes as far as to claim that community interpreting "represents a combination of two separate professions: interpreting and social work."

This focus on "assistance" or "service" can be attributed to several reasons. First, community interpreting as we know it today has grown out of social needs and has been shaped by the social service sector, which has viewed the community interpreter, to some extent at least, as akin to a community or social worker. Second, community interpreting has long been, and still is to a large extent today, the domain of volunteers, who see their task as that of helper. Third, the fact that those needing community interpreting are, for the most part, refugees and new immigrants, who do not know the new society in which they must function, further reinforces the idea that more than interlingual mediation is required.

Cultural Brokering

The problem in mediating communication between such clients and service agencies, according to the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, is due not only to linguistic differences, but also and primarily to cultural differences. The "client" of community interpreting belongs invariably to a minority group whose culture—even more than language—is not understood by the majority group which organizes and offers the services to which the client is entitled. This ministry has therefore renamed "community interpreting," "cultural interpreting," which it describes in the following way (cited in Giovannini, 1992a):

> We define interpreting as including the communication of conceptual and cultural factors that are relevant to the given interaction as part of the lingual transmission. ... This model of interpreting service was developed out of an awareness that communication is seriously impeded by insensitivity to the role of culture in the content and manner of communication, especially in formal interactions.

This focus on cultural interpreting seems to be based on the assumption that other types of interpreting do not pay attention to cultural factors. However, in Jean Herbert's *Interpreter's Handbook* (1968: 14-15), which is intended for conference interpreters, emphasis is laid on the fact that satisfactory interpretation of a speech involves being acquainted with the specific culture of the country of the speaker, for even if the interpreter "feels at home in Paris, that will not necessarily make him understand what is meant by a speaker from Morocco" (who is speaking in French). And, while court interpreting has the reputation of being "literal," i.e. transferring words rather than ideas, de Jongh, in her

Introduction to Court Interpreting, presents a full chapter on language and culture and stresses the fact that "the place of origin and the intended meaning of the speaker, among other factors, must be taken into account by the court interpreter" (1992: 61).

The words "among other factors" found in the citation above from de Jongh seem to provide a clue to the particularity of community interpreting as opposed to other types of interpreting: while in the latter, culture is viewed as one element among many to be taken into consideration, in the former the cultural aspect is stressed, even to the detriment of the linguistic aspect. This is clearly revealed in the presentation of the roles and responsibilities of cultural interpreters in the *Cultural Interpreter Training Manual* (cited in Giovannini, 1992a). Out of a list of 18 points, only one deals with the linguistic aspect of interpreting, while at least five cover the cultural aspect, with the interpreter expected to explain cultural differences and misunderstandings, and to make explicit what may be behind the client's responses or decisions (see Appendix).

Advocacy

Linked to the focus on cultural brokering in the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship's concept of community interpreting is the emphasis on advocacy—indeed, the two constitute two of the three key functions that the interpreter is expected to fulfil, the third and last one being "linguistic interpreting" (Giovannini, 1992b). Advocacy implies defending, pleading for or actively supporting the client. In other words, the community interpreter is seen as a guide and counsellor as well as a power broker working in favour of his "underprivileged" client. This too is clearly revealed in the list of roles and responsibilities of the cultural interpreter, where it is stated that the latter "advises client about rights and options in the situation;" "ensures that the client has all relevant information and controls the interaction;" and "challenges racially/culturally prejudiced statements or conclusions" on the part of the service provider (cited in Giovannini, 1992a).

While the term "advocacy" is studiously avoided in the documentation of other community interpreting services, there is often still a hint of it present. For example, the Alberta Vocational Centre's *Community Interpreter Skills Training Program Curriculum Handbook* lists, among the competencies to be acquired, "ways of dealing with stereotypical or racist remarks."

It is certainly true, as Cynthia Roy (1990) has shown, that the interpreter, especially in settings involving few people, is more than a mere conduit as traditionally believed; that the interpreter is, in fact, an active participant in the

communicative event between two parties who do not speak the same language. However, it is the nature of the participation of the interpreter that is at issue here. Roy's study revealed that the interpreter (working in American Sign Language and English) was actively involved in interpreting conventions for language use and in creating turn exchanges; she attempted, for example, to resolve problems of overlapping talk, on the basis of the social acceptability and cultural appropriateness of a given party taking a turn at each specific moment. She did not, however, "favour" one party over another or try to ensure that her client controlled the interaction. She made her decisions regarding turn exchanges in terms of her knowledge of the social situation, of both participants, their needs and their relationships. The concept of the community interpreter being an advocate, as suggested by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, may only polarize the situation between the two parties and may well contribute to the failure of the communication that the interpreter is trying to establish.

Conciliation

Another, somewhat opposite approach to community interpreting, has been proposed by P. Diane Schneider of the Community Relations Service of the U.S. Department of Justice (1992), who sees interlingual mediation as a function that is increasingly being combined with that of conciliation in situations of conflict. She claims that "the function of interpreter/conciliator is performed more frequently than one might imagine, without being defined as such," (1992: 57) and that

> officials throughout this country are utilizing interpreter/conciliator/mediator professionals who can assist them and minority communities in reducing tensions, identifying common concerns and mutual solutions to issues creating tension in the community. (1992: 58)

The role of conciliator involves conferring privately with parties to the conflict to determine their perceptions of the issues and concerns and then participating in joint discussions, ensuring that both parties are correctly understood not just in terms of words but also in terms of motives. Schneider believes that the interpreter has some skills that are transferable to the function of "interpreter/conciliator" (he conceals personal emotions, remains neutral, is able to summarize accurately), but that there are many additional skills he would need to develop to be effective in this role (e.g. "reword or soften positions taken by parties in conflict when necessary to avoid a breakdown in communication" (1992: 63)). According to Schneider, an interpreter who has developed these

skills may indicate to the parties concerned the need for services beyond "pure" interpretation and offer to perform in the role of "interpreter/conciliator;" an interpreter who does not have conciliation skills, on the other hand, can work with a conciliator as assistant.

The conciliation approach proposed by Schneider, like the advocacy approach adopted by others, goes well beyond what is normally considered interpreting in any context.

Philosophical Approaches and Community Interpreting Tasks

Given that the approach to community interpreting is different from one service or region to another, the tasks of community interpreters will also differ. While they all render orally a message expressed in one language into another language, they may be called upon to do much more, depending on the philosophical orientation of the community interpreting service.

Not only is the community interpreter an active participant in the communication event by resolving overlap, offering turns to speak and taking his own turn to speak, as Roy (1990) has shown, but he may perform other tasks before, after and during the communication event that he is called upon to interpret.

Before the communication event, the community worker speaks to the client, "establishes a positive connection," attempts to clarify the client's problem, and "explains the role of the professional or institutional worker" they are about to see (Giovannini, 1992a). This reflects the "assistance" approach outlined above. He may also, at this stage, integrate the "advocacy" approach, by advising the client "about rights and options in this situation" (Giovannini, 1992a).

During the communication event, in addition to acting as "chair" to ensure that each party has his turn to speak, he may be required to act as an impartial mediator if the conciliation approach is adopted, or as an advocate for the rights of the minority language speaker if the advocacy approach is embraced.

Following the interpreted event, the community interpreter's tasks are often not over. He may, at this point, resume his role of helper and advocate and advise the client "about rights and options in the situation" (Giovannini, 1992a). In any case, he needs to ensure that the client has all the relevant information for any follow-up. Often a busy doctor will give last-minute instructions to the patient and then rush off, telling the interpreter to "convey the information" to the client. So the community interpreter has post-interpreting tasks that may be time-consuming.

In addition to tasks linked directly to the interpreted event, the community interpreter may be required to perform other language-related tasks that could range from phoning a government service for information concerning the client to helping them fill out forms. And, as the client is "lost in an alien land," he often seizes the opportunity of having a person who speaks his language ask all kinds of often unrelated questions. These tasks derive primarily from the assistance role attributed to community interpreters.

The different tasks that a community interpreter may be called upon to perform are a direct result of the approach to community interpreting adopted by an interpreting service, and the interpretation of this approach by interpreters hired by the service.

Training, Selection and Employment of Community Interpreters

The multitude of tasks that constitute community interpreting require, in principle, highly qualified and carefully selected professionals. But community interpreter training programmes, which were launched only in the 1980s, are limited in number, scope and duration. Thus, a large proportion of community interpreters have little or no specific training for their tasks.

Training

What little training is available is often outside the academic setting. In fact, there is only a handful of programmes that actually lead to a university degree in this field. These are concentrated in Australia, which "leads the world in the provision of community interpreting and translating services and in the regulation and training of interpreters and translators for that provision" (Blewett, 1988). Deakin University in Victoria, for instance, offers a 3-year B.A. programme and a one-year Graduate Diploma course in a number of languages, including Japanese, Turkish, Arabic, Chinese, Spanish and Vietnamese.

But, in many academic institutions, community interpreting still has not achieved the status of a discipline worth a degree or graduate diploma. Indeed, those offerings that do exist at the post-secondary level are generally more limited in scope and are often considered as "continuing education." They range from a single special course (e.g. at Georgetown University—see Gehrke, 1990) to a three-course series (at the University of Minnesota) to an integrated part-time

one-year programme (at the Alberta Vocational Centre). At best, they lead to a certificate.

Much, if not most, community interpreter training is still provided by organizations which hire community interpreters. The latter can be subdivided into two categories: community interpreting services, often funded at least partially by government, which oversee the provision of interpreting services within their community; and service providers, or "user agencies" as they are sometimes called, which are such institutions as hospitals and schools which use community interpreters to provide a specific public service.

Community interpreting services normally offer some pre-service training as well as on-the-job training and support. The pre-service "core training" proposed to government-sponsored cultural interpreting services in Ontario covers three basic areas—basic skills of cultural interpreting, cross-cultural communication skills, and personal and interpersonal skills—and deals with thirty different topics ranging from the role and responsibility of the cultural interpreter to defining value systems and practising assertiveness techniques. In some cases, interpreters may also receive pre-service or in-service specialized training to be able to work in a given specialized setting (e.g. a maternity ward). On-the-job training and professional development, while apparently available, does not seem to be systematized. A recent evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship's Cultural Interpreter Service Projects revealed that, while, for the most part, cultural interpreters were satisfied with the training received, "the amount and nature of training varied among the sites and ... there are insufficient resources to provide the level of training prescribed in the Ministry's Cultural Interpreter Training Manual" (Chan, 1992: 12). However, the training programme just described is obliged to be as wide in scope as possible as no other training is presently available for community interpreting in Ontario. In Victoria, Australia, on the other hand, where initial training is assured by universities, the Victoria Interpreting and Translating Service provides only specialized training in specific areas such as legal, mental health and education interpreting.

Limited specialized training is also available through some service providers, or "user agencies." This is the case, for example, with Immigration in the United States. Such training is normally *ad hoc*, very short (from a couple of hours to a couple of days) and infrequently offered, and is often limited to a presentation of the structure and procedures of the user agency and an introduction to the pertinent terminology typically used. It is impossible to

provide any global picture of such training, which is often in-service rather than pre-service.

What is characteristic of the majority of the courses and programmes described above is that the lectures and exercises are conducted primarily in English, because it is financially unfeasible to set up separate courses for students with different language combinations. While, at certain points, "language facilitators" may be brought in to help the primary instructor with bilingual work, they are often simply members of the linguistic minority community with no special training in or aptitude for teaching or interpreting. Far more time is spent on talking about interpreting than in actually developing interpreting skills. So, even "trained" community interpreters are, for the most part, not as skilled as one would like them to be.

Selection

This problem may stem not solely from the quality of the training, but from the process of selection. Normally, training and selection are intimately tied together in two ways. First, in the case of professional programmes, there must be careful selection of candidates prior to training. Second, following training, there must be a careful selection of graduates, which involves weeding out those who do not meet pre-established standards.

Procedures for the selection of candidates for training seem to vary from one programme or interpreting service to another. They range from entrance examinations (e.g. at the Vancouver Community College) to interviews (e.g. in the Ontario cultural interpreting services) to a study of applicant files. In some situations, the only selection criterion seems to be a person's alleged ability to speak another language, whereas, in other cases (e.g. the Community Interpreter Project in England), we are told that "students are carefully selected for training" (Corsellis, 1990: 30), but have few details on the selection procedure.

The question of selecting candidates for community interpreter training is a delicate one in light of a couple of factors. First, because community interpreting still depends, to a large extent, on volunteers (some of whom are already working in a given agency or institution in another capacity), it is obviously hard to be too selective. Second, given that community interpreting often involves uncommon languages, it is difficult to find candidates, much less to be selective in their choice.

Selection following community interpreter training is not always as rigorous as it should be either, often for the same reasons. In fact, in the case of many short programmes (e.g. the Ontario cultural interpreting service programs), there is no final examination at the end of the period of training. Just having taken the training gives entry to the profession!

Given that training is limited and even non-existent in many places, alternative procedures for selecting community interpreters, which are unrelated to training, have been set up in some jurisdictions. In Australia, for instance, those who are not graduates of university interpreter training programmes have the possibility of taking accreditation examinations set by the National Accreditation Authority of Translators and Interpreters. In Ontario, a new accreditation test has just been established for Spanish and Arabic community interpreters.

At present, there are in fact three ways of entering the profession: (a) through specific training; (b) through an accreditation test; and (c) in an *ad hoc* manner (by application, volunteering). What seems to be required is a combination of training and accreditation examinations.

Employment Conditions

The constant argument made against initiating more rigorous training and selection procedures is that the employment conditions of community interpreters do not justify such measures. More specifically, it is believed that community interpreters do not earn enough to warrant their following a long and serious programme of study. Partly as a result of this perception, serious training programmes therefore are slow to develop.

There are, indeed, few full-time positions for community interpreters, although a small number of them may be hired as regular employees by certain large institutions such as hospitals. The vast majority work on a free-lance basis, as do most conference and court interpreters. However, community interpreters are paid, not by the day or the half-day like the latter, but on an hourly basis at a very low rate. In fact, community interpreting alone does not provide an adequate source of income to most people in the field; it is, in many cases, a secondary or even tertiary activity, which provides a supplementary income. This seems to be the case today in most countries of the world.

The inadequate income is often not compensated for by an idyllic working environment. While today many community interpreters work either through community interpreting services or translation/interpretation agencies, which try to convince user agencies of the importance of scheduling interpreted sessions well in advance and providing the necessary documentation for

preparation, these professionals are still obliged to rush to jobs ill-prepared at very short notice.

Frustration caused by last-minute calls is sometimes compounded by the somewhat negative or dismissive attitude of other professionals towards community interpreters. The attitude problem in the case of health care providers has been explained as follows (Abraham, 1994: 13-14):

> Working with interpreters means that the service provider must rely on the skills and knowledge of a third party to ensure the adequacy and completeness of what is being communicated. At the same time, the service provider's ignorance of the patient's cultural background may mean that s/he is dependent on the interpreter's directions. A role reversal situation which may challenge and be perceived as threatening to the traditional acceptance of the superior knowledge of the health care professional. The extra time required for the interpretation process may make the service provider impatient... This sense of frustration, loss of control, uncertainty, and stress will often be expressed in the service provider's attitudes towards those who are providing interpreter services.

Whatever the explanation of the attitude, not being treated as a professional is a source of aggravation for the community interpreter.

Goals and Objectives for the Future

In order for community interpreters to be treated as professionals, they will have to earn recognition for their role and their skills. This apparently simple statement implies a great deal of work in a number of areas.

Clarification of the Role(s) of the Community Interpreter

The first step required to attain recognition is that of providing a better understanding of the role(s) of the community interpreter, both to service providers and to individual clients (i.e. the minority language speakers). However, as we saw above, the role of the community interpreter today is ill-defined or, more commonly, too vast. He is often expected to be not only a mediator between two languages, but also a helpmate and guide, cultural broker and even advocate or conciliator. In other words, he wears many hats. But is this feasible or desirable?

The feasibility of role combination is questionable, in principle, because it is, in fact, difficult to be a helpmate to and even an advocate of those not speaking the language of the country and still to retain the objectivity and impartiality required to interpret well. Role combination certainly constitutes a problem for community interpreters. At the first training symposium for Ontario cultural interpreters in November 1992, one of the key issues that emerged was the

> confusion and inconsistency in the minds of both the trainees and trainers in their understanding of the parameters of the role of the cultural interpreter. Some clearly see themselves as advocating for the client and are comfortable in that role. Others are both uncomfortable and unclear about what that means. (Giovannini, 1992 b: 29)

Service providers are equally confused about the role of community interpreters. During focus group sessions held with health care practitioners in Vancouver, one group brought out the problem of a lack of clear understanding of the role of an interpreter, while another recognized as a "significant problem" the question of when the interpreter should step out of his specific role.

However, little research has been conducted on this issue, although questions on the degree of satisfaction with community interpreters have occasionally been asked of service providers (Chan, 1992: 19). What is re-quired is an objective evaluation by seasoned interpreters of actual community interpreting in action to evaluate what bias, if any, the non-interpreting roles may add. This could be a two-step evaluation: first, a global appraisal of a number of interpretations and their breakdown into three main categories (good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory); then, a detailed evaluation of each interpreting performance to see whether the general rating is affected either negatively or positively by interventions which reveal any role other than that of "linguistic mediator." Any such evaluation will have to take into account, however, Wadensjö's warning that "what is given/taken as neutral style in a particular circumstance, may in another well be given/taken as highly biased" (1992: 258).

Such an evaluation, whatever its results, should lead to a clearer determination of what constitutes "good community interpreting"—at least from the point of view of interpreting professionals. And this in turn should enable us, interpreters, interpreter trainers, and interpreter service administrators, to define better what the community interpreter's role should be.

Provision of Training for Professionals Working with Interpreters

You may argue that service providers expect community interpreters to assume many roles. This is certainly true if one can judge by some of the issues raised by health care practitioners in the focus groups referred to above: the latter expected the interpreter to be responsible, for instance, for "relationship building"! However, the same groups stressed the importance of knowing what to expect from interpreters, knowing "what the interpreter will or will not do."

This calls for the education of professionals working with interpreters and of user agencies in general. Such education is provided best, not by individual interpreters who may not have the courage to confront other professionals, but by interpreting services through workshops held for user agencies. Such workshops can cover simultaneously a variety of goals, many of which have been clearly identified by C. Solomou, a member of the Language Services Division of the Office of Ethnic Affairs of Victoria (Australia), which offers such sessions: they range from discussing the role of interpreters to providing a list of do's and don'ts in working with interpreters (Solomou, 1993: 427-428).

The need for the training of professionals is demonstrated by the constantly increasing demand for it in Victoria. Unfortunately, not many interpreting services offer such workshops. And yet, the Victoria experience shows that they are an effective means to ensure that interpreters and professionals work together with mutual respect and acceptance of each other's roles. It also ensures a better quality of interpretation, as even the best trained interpreter finds it difficult to work effectively with professionals who have unrealistic expectations of him or who do not make appropriate use of him.

Provision of Training for Community Interpreters

It will take more than workshops for professionals working with interpreters for the former to gain respect for them. Interpreters have to earn recognition for their skills, and, in order to do so, they have first to develop them. More training programmes are required if community interpreters are to meet professional expectations. Ideally, community interpreter training programmes should be geared to respond to the latter and should lead to a university degree. But that lies somewhere in the distant future, at least in North America. At the moment, the trend seems to be the development of a few such programmes at the community or junior college level.

However, given the very restricted number of educational institutions offering appropriate courses or programmes, the only way to guarantee that every community interpreter has access to training is for all community interpreting services and/or service providers to offer at least some basic pre-service training, pre-service and to make it compulsory. To ensure that this training, however short, brings potential interpreters up to a minimum level of competency, candidates should be carefully pre-selected and even more carefully evaluated at the end of the training period. Once the number of college/university offerings increases, these "employers" of interpreters can then shift their focus from pre-service to more specialized in-service training.

Provision of Training for Trainers of Community Interpreters

Those coordinating interpreting activities in interpreting services or user agencies often have little background in training or interpreting and the relatively small number of interpreting instructors presently available will certainly not be able to handle the number of programmes required. Therefore, training needs to be set up for potential trainers of community interpreters.

Steps have already been taken by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship to provide training for interpreting coordinators whose responsibility it is to train community interpreters. So far, five full days of instruction have been offered in 1994. And videos on training have been prepared as well, so that future trainers will have some basic concepts of interpreter training. Laudable as these efforts are, however, they are only a beginning. Just as a 30-hour programme does not turn out qualified interpreters, so also five days of trainer education does not a good trainer make.

This is especially true when the would-be trainer is not himself an interpreter. The entire question of who should be trained as interpreter trainers needs to be examined. The most obvious response would seem to be experienced community interpreters, who know the practice of the profession but not the teaching methods. They would be the most likely to benefit from the short training for trainers currently available, and the most likely to provide would-be interpreters with the skills and knowledge required to earn recognition.

Accreditation of Community Interpreters

Finally, the respect of other professionals for community interpreters would certainly increase if the latter's competency were guaranteed by a rigorous

accreditation system. Indeed, it is not enough to evaluate a potential interpreter's abilities at the end of training; what is also required is national recognition of their interpreting skills by means of an accreditation or certification procedure established by such professional bodies as the National Accreditation Authority of Translators and Interpreters in Australia (NAATI) or the Canadian Translators and Interpreters Council (CTIC).

Sound accreditation procedures generally involve a test administered to all practitioners, whether they are university graduates in the field or not. But whatever the procedures adopted, their goal is to ensure professional service. The essential role of such accreditation in the professionalization of the field is clearly indicated by the following statement made in the Australian context: "Until NAATI, there were no standards... Equally, until NAATI, there was no identifiable profession" (Blewett, 1988). But accreditation procedures similar to NAATI's still need to be set up in most countries, and NAATI's testing needs to be extended to graduates of interpreting programmes.

Conclusion

Before any of the goals and objectives outlined above are seriously worked upon, we should pause and ponder the question raised by Adolfo Gentile in 1993: is there really any need to establish a separate category of interpreting called "community interpreting"? Gentile (1993: 257) seems to feel that the emphasis on setting in the term "community interpreting" (as well as "conference interpreting" and "court interpreting") is unfortunate, because "the distinctions between interpreting performance should not be dictated by the environment in which it takes place but by the professional skills involved in its performance." While he acknowledges that different adaptations of the techniques may be required by different settings, he believes that the interpreter is fundamentally performing the same interpreting function and should maintain the same high standards of performance. In other words, Gentile appears to be questioning the very need for separate "types" of interpreting based on setting. The question is a valid one and needs to be examined.

I will not attempt to answer that question here. However, if community interpreting is, indeed, a distinct branch of interpreting, then we need to define better its scope, clarify its role and take other steps to bring this "distinct" profession up to the standards of other types of interpreting including conference interpreting and court interpreting. This first international conference on interpreting in community settings is an ideal forum in which to ponder such weighty questions and to ensure that interpreting in the community receives due recognition whether as an integral part of interpreting or as a distinct branch of interpreting.

THE CRITICAL LINK: INTERPRETERS IN THE COMMUNITY

PAPERS FROM THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INTERPRETING IN LEGAL, HEALTH, AND SOCIAL SERVICE SETTINGS
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