ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS IN SITUATIONS WHERE THE LANGUAGE OF INTERPRETATION SHIFTS: THE AUSIT CODE OF ETHICS

BY JIM HLAVAC

ABOUT JIM HLAVAC

- ○ Senior Lecturer in Translation and interpreting Studies at Monash University (Australia)

- ○ Certified translator and interpreter
  - English, Croatian, German

- ○ Has published various works – themes of research:
  - Pedagogy of interpreting
  - Multilinguism in interpreting situations
  - Intercultural communication
  - Standards and benchmarks of interpreting and translation

STRUCTURE OF THE ARTICLE

○ Language shifts: what is shifting?

○ Examples of language shifts

○ Ethical considerations

○ Data collection on shifting among a sample of 60 interpreters

○ AUSIT Code of Ethics

SHIFTING

○ Within a conversation among multilingual speakers → switching from one language to another

○ 2 main reasons:

- **Perceived language proficiency**
  - Every multilingual speaker has a dominant language
- **Re-negotiation of personal ethnic, educational and socio-economic attributes**
  - Direct client request or inferences (through LINGUISTIC MONITORING)

EXAMPLES OF SHIFTING

○ From Hlavac's personal experience

- Croatian → German, Ukranian → Russian, Assyrian → Arabic

For example:	
Ethnicity	Ashkali
Citizenship	Serbian
Residence	Kosovo, Germany
First language	Albanian
Dominant language	German
Language choice for interpreting	German

INTERPRETING SERVICES

o Allocated by institutions

  • Language determined by the client's citizenship/ethnicity

o The client can choose another language (national identity, sense of duty)

o Difficult to gather data about people's linguistic biography

  • Mismatched interpreting services

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CODES OF CONDUCT

o Formal code – distinguished a profession from an occupation (Mikkelson 2000/2001, p.49)

o Categorisation of behaviour as: desirable, neutral or undesirable

o Legal, medical and sign language amongst the first

o Need and validity

o Can such behaviours be universal or will they inevitably remain culturally-specific?

THE AUSIT CODE OF ETHICS

○ AUSIT: Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators, professional association
  • Founded in 1987

○ AUSIT Code of Ethics (CoE)
  • History:
    • First drafted in the early 1990s and completed in 1995
    • Redeveloped and revised in 1999
    • Last update 2012

• Frequently included in contemporary research in Interpreting Studies in Australia
• Contains eight main sections:
  • Professional conduct
  • Confidentiality
  • Competence
  • Impartiality
  • Accuracy
  • Employment
  • Professional development
  • Professional solidarity

THE STUDY (FREQUENCY OF SHIFTING)

o Informants:
- Accredited, recognised and/or practising interpreters
- 67 responses, but 7 excluded due to incomplete/missing data
- Australian-based
- At least tri-lingual
- 44 possess formal accreditation or recognition
- Not included:
  - Interpreters with only two languages
  - Data from clients, agencies or others

o Methodology:
- August and September 2008
- Informants contacted through AUSIT and a training session by NAATI
- Voluntary participation
- Completion of an anonymous questionnaire
  - Settings of acquisition of language
  - Experiences of client shifting or trying to shift
  - Details about experiences
  - Hypothetical situations involving shifts: provide judgements and comments

INCIDENCE OF SHIFTING

Pattern of shifting: languages involved, directions or motivations	Number
Language of country of previous migration → Language of country of birth Spanish → Italian Oromo → Somali Spanish (→ Italian) → Sicilian Japanese → Mandarin German → Hungarian	5
National language → Regional language[3] Mandarin → Cantonese Mandarin → Shanghainese Urdu → Punjabi Amharic → Oromo Urdu → Pushto	5
Minority language[3] → National language Karen → Burmese Karen → Thai Nuer → (Sudanese) Arabic	3
National language 1 → National language 2 Dari → Pushto Croatian → Bosnian Bosnian → Croatian	3
National language → Minority language Indonesian → Hokkien Serbian → Hungarian	2
Language of country of birth → Language of country of previous migration Dinka → Swahili	1
Desire to avoid contact with interpreter from L1 community French → Arabic → French	1

Table 2: Type and details of shifting recorded amongst informants

○ **33% of the informants reported shifts**

○ **Seven categories of shifts**
- Status of languages involved
- Motivation for shifting
- Direction of the shift

○ **Breakdown of shifting**
- 12 shifts initiated by client for client's benefit
- 5 cases are not clear about who initiated the shift
- 3 shifts initiated by interpreters

THE ETHICS OF SHIFTING

o Study about hypothetical scenarios
  • Acceptable – borderline – not acceptable – no answer

o Language x (in which communication commences)

o Language y (into which shifting occurs)

TYPES OF SHIFTS

1) Client-initiated for the client's own benefit
   o Client prefers speaking in y and interpreter can also speak it – what to do:
   - Switch – is it acceptable? (communication VS performance inconsistency)
     - A: 35, B: 7, N:10, NA: 8
   - Not switch – is it acceptable? (lack of proficiency VS accommodating the client's request)
     - A: 19, B: 10, N:23, NA: 8

2) Client-initiated for the interpreter's benefit
   o Client knows interpreter also speaks y and offers to shift – what to do:
   - Switch – is it acceptable? (facilitating communication)
     - A: 25, B: 10, N: 13, NA: 8
   - Not switch – is it acceptable? (safer options VS risk of offending VS lack of preparation)
     - A: 28, B: 11, N: 10, NA: 11

TYPES OF SHIFTS

3) Interpreter-initiated for the client's benefit – 2 options:
- Client struggles with x and interpreter offers to switch to y:
  - Facilitating communication VS implicit evaluation of the client's language skills
    - A: 36, B: 5, N: 9, NA: 10
- Client struggles with x and interpreter suggests/recommends switching to y:
  - Facilitating communication VS possible offense
  - If a switch is possible, should the interpreter inform the other party?
    - A: 31, B: 5, N: 1, NA: 24

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

o Shifting
- Acceptable:
  - Clients shift and interpreters follow them
  - Interpreters recommend a shift
- Not acceptable:
  - Clients shift and interpreters don't follow them
- Justified by a desire to facilitate communication

o Not shifting – justifications:
- No obligation
- Lack of practice or preparedness
  - Suggested by ethical guidelines

FACTORS THAT CO-DETERMINE THE LIKELIHOOD OF SHIFTING

o Not included in the presented hypothetical situations:
- Reference to specific languages
- Formal diagnosis of proficiency levels
- Status of the languages
- Relationship between language and external factors (e.g. citizenship, religion)

o Pragmatic and politeness norms
- Vary from language to language – careful with different formulations

PROPOSED GUIDELINES FOR SHIFTING

o Accuracy:
- Short conversation and confirmation of the language pair
- Clear uncertainties
- Truth and completeness

o Professional conduct:
- Offer to shift (non-dominant competence)
- Risk of exercising power/influence over the client
- Accept only assignment you are competent to perform
  - Or inform your client (shift mid-assignment)
- Risk of encroachment
  - Inform the contracting body of shifts

Thank you for your attention!