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Interpreters = Cultural Mediators?

ABSTRACT

It is widely acknowledged that interpreters need to have knowledge of the cultures represented by the languages they work with. However, it is not clear what interpreters are expected to do with this knowledge. Some scholars recommend interpreters be cultural mediators while others propose the role of interpreters to be separated from the role of cultural mediators. This study explores the role of interpreters in the face of cultures from an industry perspective by looking into existing professional guidelines on interpreters' roles. Specifically, the study compares and contrasts the codes of conduct for interpreters from a number of associations and institutions in the UK, the US and China. The study seeks to investigate: (1) which role, the conduit/communication facilitator or the cultural mediator, is expected of interpreters and to what extent interpreters' role as cultural mediators is referred to or defined in these codes of conduct; (2) what are interpreters expected to do with their knowledge of cultures in the face of cultures/cultural issues. Data analysis suggests that: (1) interpreters are seldom expected to perform the role of cultural mediators, and in the rare cases where they are, they are advised to agree with their clients beforehand or to perform the role using their professional judgement, which arguably they are not trained for in their interpreting course; (2) interpreters are required to have cultural knowledge, and are expected to use this knowledge for linguistic mediation, but existing guidelines are not adequately helpful. The study then discusses the implications of these findings.

KEY WORDS

Codes of conduct, interpreters, cultural mediators, interpreter training

1. Introduction

The relationship between cultural knowledge, interpreting and interpreters of all modes and settings is well depicted in an article on the AIIC website by Holly Mikkelson (1999):

It is almost universally acknowledged that interpreters working in medical and social service settings need to be acutely aware of cultural differences (hence the term "cultural interpreter" that is so prevalent in Canada), although there is widespread disagreement about what they should do with that knowledge (Carr et al, 1997). Court interpreters are also expected to take culture into account, although they are much more restricted in their ability to educate their clients about cultural differences (Gonzalez et al, 1991). What many of these interpreters may not recognise is that conference interpreters, too, consider themselves not just linguistic but also cultural intermediaries. Seleskovitch (1978a & b, Seleskovitch & Lederer, 1984) has written extensively about the link between language and culture. Perhaps Jones (1998, p. 4) sums it up best when he says that "in all of their work, (conference) interpreters must bridge the cultural and conceptual gaps separating the participants in a meeting."

Almost 20 years later, the consensus among interpreting scholars remains the same i.e. that interpreters need to be equipped with knowledge of the cultures represented by the languages they work with (e.g. Roy, 2002; Angelelli, 2004; Wadensjö, 2008). And the debate regarding what interpreters should do with their cultural knowledge is still ongoing (e.g. Pöchhacker, 2008). What seems to be clearer in the debate, however, is a stronger voice that interpreters need to be cultural mediators, also known as cultural brokers (e.g. Katan, 2004; Gustafsson, Norström & Fioretos, 2013) or under various similar denominations, such as language mediator, language and cultural mediator (or linguistic and cultural mediator), intercultural translator, intercultural mediator, social interpreter, and social translator (Archibald & Garzone, 2014).

The current paper examines the role of interpreters as cultural mediators by looking into the codes of conduct that interpreters are bound with at work. This is a new departure of perspective, as the study focuses on the industry requirements for interpreters, rather than on interpreting scholars' viewpoints on what interpreters should do in the face of cultures or cultural issues.

2. The debate: interpreters vs cultural mediators

Apart from the concept of an interpreter, there are various definitions of culture and cultural mediators. The definitions used for the purposes of the current study are explained below before the discussion of the interpreters' role.

2.1. The concepts of culture, interpreter and cultural mediator

The definition of culture adopted in this paper is in line with that of Žegarac (2008, p. 52):

> The culture of a given group can be seen as a complex web of cultural representations relating to
> different types of regularities, or themes, such as the following:
>
> - Orientations to life and belief;
>
> - Values and principles;
>
> - Perceptions of role relationships, including rights and obligations associated with them;
>
> - Various norms and conventions of communication;
>
> - Institutions, which may be formal, such as the legal, political and educational system, or
>   informal, such as a poetry reading group, a cocktail party or a knitting club.

The reason for adopting this definition is Žegarac's social approach, which highlights the differences between different cultures. This is what interpreters need to pay special attention to as the ones standing in the middle between two culturally different parties for the purpose of making the communication between them possible.

The definition of an interpreter used in this paper follows that of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC): "An **interpreter** works with **spoken words** in a particular context, conveying a message from one language to another (…)" (AIIC website; accessed on 1 July 2015; emphasis original). This view of professional interpreting reflects the scholastic views of interpreting, such as that by Pöchhacker (2008, p. 11; emphasis original):

> Interpreting is a form of Translation in which a **first and final rendition in another language** is
> produced on the basis of a **one-time presentation** of an utterance in a source language.

With regard to the concept of a cultural mediator, there have been different labels, and this study adopts the definition proposed by Stephen Bochner (1981, p.3), cited in Archibald & Garzone (2014, p. 8-9):

The mediating person is an individual who serves as a link between two or more cultures and social systems. The essence of the mediating function is to shape exchanges between the participating societies so that the contact will benefit those cultures, on terms that are consistent with their respective value systems.

Hence, the key difference between an interpreter and a cultural mediator is that an interpreter passively conveys the messages from one language to another, whereas a cultural mediator can work to "shape" the exchanges between two parties. In other words, interpreters are not responsible for the contents of communication between two parties but cultural mediators may intervene if they decide that the contents of communication may not benefit the participating cultures.

2.2. Interpreters' role

Roy (2002) has listed the following roles assigned to interpreters as discussed in interpreting literature:

- **Helpers**: offer advice, translate messages, make decisions for one or both sides (p.349)

- **Conduit**: a translation machine refraining from taking over the decision-making responsibilities (p. 349-350)

- **Communication-facilitator**: a channel inserted to facilitate the transfer of messages from a sender to a receiver. (p. 350-351).

- **Bilingual, bicultural specialists**: "By the end of the 70s and 80s most descriptions of interpreters acknowledged the fact that interpreters must be sensitive to the fact that they are communicating across cultures as well as across languages" (p. 351). Descriptions of cultural sensitivity include: awareness of regional/dialectal differences in languages, nonverbal differences, different attitudes towards time, different forms of personal address, etc.

Among the four roles, the first one touches upon the idea of interpreters as mediators (which will be discussed in more detail later in this paper), as here interpreters are expected to make decisions for one or both parties of communication. The last role echoes the consensus mentioned by Mikkelson (1999) that interpreters need to be culturally knowledgeable. Whereas the "bicultural specialists" in Roy's sense (2002) are advised to be

sensitive to a range of cultural issues, it is not clear how they should respond to these issues during the interpreting.

It is worth noting that Roy (2002) sees the role of interpreters as communication facilitators as being fundamentally the same as that of conduit. When referring to this role, she states that:

> What is missing [from the role of communication facilitator; note added] are coherent, well-defined parameters of language functions that interpreters must perform to accomplish communication, although it is still clear what functions, specifically, lie outside of the role of an interpreter. […] It is clear that the interpreter while interpreting is still performing the transfer of one form to another form; it is the conduit notion in the disguise of communication (p. 350-351).

With regard to interpreters as cultural mediators, Reeves (1994) is one of the earliest scholars who explicitly discusses this possibility. Citing general cultural issues arising from both conference interpreting and dialogue interpreting and especially focusing on the latter, Reeves (1994) suggests that a new dimension be added to interpreting:

> That dimension may include effective cultural briefing on systems, ways of moving towards negotiating outcomes, explanations of how negotiation partners use signals, subtexts and non-verbal gestures. This militates against the view of the interpreter as the neutral language channel and adds to it the function of cultural adviser. Moreover, this should work in both directions (p.46).

At the same time, Reeves also talks about the possibility of having two professional figures between two communicating parties so that:

> (…) the function of the cultural intermediary be formally separated from that of the linguistic intermediary so that the interpretation of the verbal message and signal together with any non-verbal signs is the task of a cultural negotiating adviser attached to whichever partner is wise enough to be so advised while the linguistic interpreter is left to cope with the surface linguistic message (p.47)

These early viewpoints regarding what interpreters should do with their cultural knowledge and whether or not they should work as cultural mediators while interpreting are also reflected in more recent interpreting literature. For example, Katan (2004) advocates that:

> The cultural interpreter's role is the same as that of the cultural mediator, and touches on the role of a mediator in any other field, from arbitrator to therapist. (p.17)

The role of a cultural mediator in this sense is very much what is referred to in Stephen Bochner's definition (see Section 2.1 above).

In contrast to Katan (2004), Pöchhacker (2008) advocates that the role of interpreting be clearly separated from the role of cultural mediation. In his view, three analytical dimensions may be used to explain interpreting as mediation: linguistic/cultural mediation, cognitive mediation and contractual mediation. Pöchhacker's terminology of "linguistic/cultural mediation" is a synonym for interpreting. Since language and culture are often inseparable, interpreters sometimes need to mediate the surface forms of what is said for the intended messages to be intelligible. In this sense, linguistic mediation is unavoidably cultural mediation. Cognitive mediation indicates the inevitable subjective autonomy of the interpreter. It prevents interpreting from being restricted to "faithful transmission" of information, and rejects the "translation machine metaphor" of interpreting. This means the interpreter judges where there is a need to mediate, be it related to conveying the contents of communication (i.e. what is said for its meaning to be understood by a receiving party), or to resolving a conflict resulting from the contents of communication (i.e. mediating like an arbitrator or therapist in the sense of Katan (2004).

Contractual mediation, on the other hand, refers to mediation intended to resolve conflicts, so as to facilitate intercultural understanding and communication beyond language demarcation. As the term itself suggests, this role is contracted or agreed with clients. Contractual mediation is then what Reeves (1994) means by "cultural intermediary" or "cultural adviser", and what Katan (2004) means by "cultural mediator", or what Stephen Bochner (2014) means by "the mediating person". For convenience, this study uses the term cultural mediator in this sense, as is also the case with other scholars cited later in this paper.

2.3. The debate

From the above discussions it can be concluded that the role of a cultural mediator is a role added to the stereotypical role of interpreters as a "conduit" or "as communication facilitators", out of considerations that the cultural differences between communicating parties may lead to conflicts. Hence, the cultural knowledge interpreters have as cultural specialists can arguably be used in two ways: (a) for linguistic mediation, as in the sense of Pöchhacker (2008); (b) for cultural mediation, as in the sense adopted in this study.

The first one is the stereotypical way of making use of an interpreter's cultural knowledge. This can be compared to the case in which a translator acts as a mediator, the only difference being that the interpreter deals with spoken texts and hearers, instead of written texts and readers:

> (…) the translator "mediate[s] between cultures (including ideologies, moral systems and socio-political structures) seeking to overcome those incompatibilities which stand in the way of transfer of meaning".
>
> … In this view, the translators act as mediators as they guarantee TL receivers linguistic and cultural accessibility to the source text, so that the latter can read it without encountering any element that is culturally opaque or unintelligible (Archibald & Garzone, 2014, p. 10).

The second use of cultural knowledge is typical for cultural mediators, but applicable to any field on top of interpreting. The person in this role is expected to arrange pre-mediation meetings individually with the intercultural parties in case of potential conflicts, meet with the parties together to resolve conflicts, and possibly meet again afterwards individually with the parties to check the outcome of the mediation (e.g., Martín & Phelan, 2009; Rădulescu & Mitrut, 2012). This role as a cultural mediator is also what is meant in the professional codes of conduct for interpreters that the present study investigates.

Scholars who propose that interpreters be cultural mediators all expect them to do more than just rendering spoken words into a different language; they are also required to resolve (potential) conflicts and facilitate communication. Scholars who propose that interpreters be freed from the role of cultural mediators have different reasons for their objection. Martín and Phelan (2009) take the stance that the two roles are complementary in that mediators are not as proficient as interpreters in rendering linguistic forms whereas interpreters are not trained to deal with intercultural conflicts. As for Pöchhacker (2008), he is concerned

(…) that interpreting may become established as contractual mediation, and particularly that intercultural mediators may be preferred to professional interpreters in some institutions (e.g. in Italian healthcare services), in that they are considered more competent in managing intercultural relations and conflicts, thus facilitating intercultural communication (Baraldi 2014, p. 18).

This raises a question: what does the interpreting industry think of the role of interpreters? Or, in other words, does the industry expect interpreters to be cultural mediators? While the view of interpreting scholars often has a direct impact on how interpreters are trained, it is important to look into what the interpreting industry expects from interpreters, with the relationship between the two being very much one of supply and demand. The current study is an attempt to find out what the industry demands of interpreters, with the aim of informing the supply end of the chain.

3. Research questions and methodology

As mentioned above, the aim of the current inquiry is to find out what the interpreting industry expects professional interpreters to do in the face of cultures or cultural issues. For this purpose, the study looks into the professional codes of conduct for interpreters. Specifically, the study seeks to answer two questions as below:

(1) In the face of cultures/cultural issues, which role, the conduit/communication facilitator, or the cultural mediator, is expected of interpreters and to what extent interpreters' role as cultural mediators is referred to or defined in these codes of conduct?

(2) In what ways are interpreters expected to do with their knowledge of cultures in the face of cultures/cultural issues?

The data sources for the study are of two types: professional associations that register interpreters and institutions that hire interpreters for their services. In all, 11 professional associations across five countries – America, Australia, China, Ireland and the UK – and 4 institutions in the UK were selected. All relevant professional codes of conduct were accessed online. For more information, see Appendix 1 and 2.

Among the 11 associations that were analyzed (See Appendix 1), the Irish Translators and Interpreters Association have two sets of codes of conduct, one for public service interpreters and the other for interpreters in general. Because of this, the data below will count 12 sets of codes of conduct for associations that register interpreters. For convenience, the research will refer to 12 associations instead of 11 in the data analysis.

At the beginning of the present study, the purpose was to examine as many associations as possible from as many countries as possible. However, while many more are accessible online, the relevant codes of conduct for interpreters in other countries, such as Italy, Spain, France and Germany, are not available in English or Chinese for the authors to read and comprehend, and therefore were not included in this study. Also, only the UK institutions were selected for analysis, due to the fact that this is largely a complete list that could be chosen as a case study. An almost complete list of institutions using interpreters' services in a given country provides a more valid and representative data set than samples chosen with different methods, in order for us to learn the expectations of interpreter users, in other words, the demand of the industry.

Having identified the institutions and associations who have interpreters' codes of conduct accessible for the present study, the author then read all the documents and identified the contents that are related to the two research questions for analysis.

4. Data analysis and results

For the first research question, i.e. which role, the conduit/communication facilitator or the cultural mediator, is expected from interpreters and to what extent the interpreters' role as cultural mediators is referred to or defined in these codes of conduct, two sets of data were generated, presented in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively:

Table 1 The role of interpreters as conduits/communication facilitators

Interpreters' role	Demands of associations registering interpreters	Demands of institutions using interpreters' services
Conduit or communication facilitator	• **All 12 associations** require interpreters interpret with absolute accuracy. • **2 out of 12 associations** (UK NRPSI & CIoL)	• **All 4 institutions** require interpreters interpret with absolute

	add in identical wording that "in exceptional circumstances a summary may be given if requested."	accuracy.

Table 2 The role of interpreters as cultural mediators

Interpreters' role	Demands of associations registering interpreters	Demands of institutions using interpreters' services
Cultural mediator	**6 out of 12 allow for no mediation** from interpreters (NAJIT; AIIC; AUSIT; ITIA --- for community interpreters; UK NRPSI; UK APCI) **3 out of 12 ask interpreters to inform** clients of risks, and clients need to agree on the risks if they insist interpreters do such work (UK ITI; AUSIT; ITIA --- general) **1 out of 12 states that "Interpreters will engage** in patient advocacy and in the intercultural mediation role of explaining cultural differences/practices to health care providers and patients only when appropriate and necessary for communication purposes, using professional judgement." (IMIA) **3 out of 12 have no mention of this role (**ATA, CIoL, TAC)	**All 4 institutions** allow for no mediation from interpreters

It is clear from Table 1 that both the associations and the institutions require that interpreters play their stereotypical role of a conduit. In the relevant codes of conduct, words like "accurate," "complete," "faithful" are often employed to describe interpreters' role during the intercultural communication they interpret. Below is an examination of some of the quotes from the interpreters' codes of conduct:

(a) Associations registering interpreters:

The Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT):

Interpreters and translators are not responsible for what the parties communicate, only for complete and accurate transfer of the message. They do not allow bias to influence their performance; likewise they do not soften, strengthen or alter the messages being conveyed.

Accuracy for the purpose of this Code means optimal and complete message transfer into the target language preserving the content and intent of the source message or text without omission or distortion.

American National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators (NAJIT):

Source-language speech should be faithfully rendered into the target language by conserving all the elements of the original message while accommodating the syntactic and semantic patterns of the target language. The rendition should sound natural in the target language, and there should be no distortion of the original message through addition or omission, explanation or paraphrasing. All hedges, false starts and repetitions should be conveyed.

UK Chartered Institute of Linguists (UK, CIoL):

Practitioners shall interpret truly and faithfully what is uttered, without adding, omitting or changing anything.

(b) Institutions using interpreters' services:

UK Visa and Immigration:

You must:

- Retain every single element of information that was contained in the original message, and interpret in as close verbatim form as English style, syntax and grammar will allow.

Bristol City Council

The interpreters will communicate all that is spoken and all that is said. Whatever is not to be interpreted must not be said.

As can be seen, in the eyes of both the institutions and the associations, interpreters are present to interpret verbatim whatever is said and they are not responsible for the content of communication. This is the role of a conduit or a translation machine as often discussed in

interpreting literature (e.g. Roy 2002; Also see Section 2.2 above). It can be inferred that if what is said by a party causes conflict, then the interpreter is not supposed to do anything about it as the content of communication is not the interpreter's responsibility. Instead, the interpreter's task is to make sure this is accurately or faithfully rendered and understood by another party. Hence, it can be further inferred that interpreters are not supposed to deal with conflicts that arise from the communication between two cultural parties. That is, they are not supposed to play the role of cultural mediators.

This conclusion is supported also by the data presented in Table 2, in which it is made explicit whether an interpreter should or should not take the role of cultural mediator. As made evident by the data presented in this study, six out of the twelve professional associations and all four institutions make it absolutely clear that an interpreter should by no means act as a cultural mediator. Below are the quotes from some of these associations and institutions:

(a) Associations registering interpreters:

International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC):

With a view to ensuring the best quality interpretation, members of the Association:

shall not perform any other duties except that of conference interpreter at conferences for which

they have been taken on as interpreters.

Charted Institute of Linguists (UK, CIoL):

Practitioners carrying out work as Public Service Interpreters or Conference Interpreters… shall not

enter into discussion, give advice or express opinions or reactions to any of the parties that exceed

their duties as interpreters

(b) Institutions using interpreters' services:

UK National Health Services:

The interpreter is present only to facilitate communication during the appointment. They should

not be asked to undertake additional/ ancillary duties during the appointment time. (e.g. those

which may be delivered by a career or advocate.)

London Metropolitan Police:

Officers should not ask an interpreter to give personal opinions, nor should they ask the interpreter not to interpret anything which is said in the presence of the non-English speaker.

The interpreter should not take control of any situation in which they have been asked to interpret.

Of special note are the associations that consider the possibility of interpreters playing the role of cultural mediators --- altogether four in number, i.e. UK ITI, AUSIT, ITIA, and IMIA. As the data presented in Table 2 shows, three associations (UK ITI, AUSIT, ITIA) advise that interpreters inform their clients of potential risks if they are asked to work as cultural mediators. These associations also specifically advise that interpreters seek the consent of clients to the potential risks in advance if they insist that the interpreters work for them as cultural mediators. This cautious stance shows that professional associations regard it as inappropriate for interpreters to work as cultural mediators without relevant training, as there will be risks which may undermine the interpreters' position. Interestingly, the International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA) states that **"**Interpreters will engage in patient advocacy and in the intercultural mediation role of explaining cultural differences/practices to health care providers and patients only when appropriate and necessary for communication purposes, using professional judgement" (online access on 10 December 2016; See Appendix 1) . What is striking here is the phrase "using professional judgement." It can be argued that without professional training on cultural mediation, interpreters will most probably lack the "professional judgement" required for this line of work for the simple reason that "professional judgement" is an ability that needs to be developed through professional training. In the absence of professional training, it is questionable that interpreters can "professionally" judge the appropriateness of them being cultural mediators during the cause of their interpreting. Consequently, there will be risks if interpreters work as cultural mediators, as warned by the UK Institute of Translators and Interpreters (ITI), the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT), and the Irish Translators and Interpreters Association (ITIA). In Section 5 below, this point will be discussed further.

On another note, in Table 2, the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) is counted twice in the data analysis (which explains why the total case number shown there is 13 instead of 12): once for its stance of insisting upon no mediation and once for its warning against mediation. As the analysis in the above paragraph indicates, even

though the AUSIT considers the possibility of interpreters working as cultural mediators, it is extremely cautious towards this role. It is thus reasonable to conclude that the association is largely against interpreters working as cultural mediators, just like the other two associations that also warn interpreters of the risks connected with cultural mediation.

Moving to the second research question, i.e., in what ways are interpreters expected to do with their knowledge of cultures in the face of disparate cultures/cultural issues, it has been found that in all of the codes of conduct the associations and institutions expect interpreters to have knowledge of the cultures represented by the languages they deal with. Nonetheless, guidelines on how to make use of such knowledge are either too general to be practically helpful, or practically helpful but not categorically comprehensive in terms of possible cultural issues. For example, using identical wordings, both the UK National Register of Public Service Interpreters and the Chartered Institute of Linguists instruct as follows:

> The competence to carry out a particular assignment shall include: a sufficiently advanced and idiomatic command of the languages concerned, with awareness of dialects and other linguistic variations that may be relevant to a particular commission of work; the particular specialist skills required; and, where appropriate, an adequate level of awareness of relevant cultural and political realities in relation to the country or countries concerned.

Evidently, interpreters are required to have "an adequate level of awareness of relevant cultural and political realities in relation to the country or countries concerned" and yet they are not told in what ways such cultural awareness can inform interpreting. For instance, even though a cultural specialist, an interpreter would not be able to know from the above codes of conduct whether it is acceptable to paraphrase a cultural term that does not have an equivalent counterpart in the other language/culture or not.

On the other hand, some associations and institutions provide very helpful guidelines regarding specific cultural issues. For example, the American Translators Association gives the following advice on how to render culturally-specific items used in interaction by a speaker:

> Culturally specific terms, such as judicial proceedings that do not exist in the target country cannot be expanded to include a long-winded explanation of it; nor can they be omitted altogether. The translator

or interpreter must come up with an appropriate term given the nature and purpose of the document

or proceeding.

Another case in point is the UK Visa and Immigration Unit, which instructs how interpreters should deal with rudeness, foreign names, and places (format original):

You must:

- spell out any foreign name or place said by the interviewing officer and/or interviewee.
- interpret language which may be offensive. For cultural reasons, obscenities may be difficult to translate. In this case you should look for the closest equivalent.

Instructions or guidelines such as the above fall into what Pöchhacker (2008; see Section 2.2 and 2.3 above) refers to as linguistic mediation, which is mediation aimed to make what is said accessible and intelligible to the party speaking a different language. Specific and helpful as they appear, these guidelines only refer to a very limited number of individual issues rather than providing a comprehensive list of all possible cultural issues that an interpreter may encounter. What seem to be especially missing are guidelines on cultural issues that attach cultural connotations or implications. In Bot and Verrept (2013), there is an example in which a Moroccan patient refers to his relationship with "Aicha Qandicha", a jinn or an evil spirit. Most Moroccans will know that this can exercise considerable influence on the person's functioning. If an interpreter follows the codes of conduct set by the American Translators Association, one wonders if the full intention of the speaker or patient in this case could be conveyed to the speaker of the other language, a doctor in the case in question.

Moreover, guidelines on how to deal with culturally specific items are sometimes not consistent in all relevant codes of conduct. For instance, instructing on how to render culturally specific items, the American National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators states the following:

English words mixed into the other language should be retained, as should culturally-bound terms which have no direct equivalent in English, or which may have more than one meaning.

Following this, an interpreter is expected to retain a foreign term, rather than doing what the American Translators Association states earlier above. Given that both of the

associations in question are based in America, interpreters at work would be left puzzled as to which code of conduct they should follow.

The overall picture of the collected data concerning what interpreters are expected to do with their cultural knowledge is presented below:

Table 3 The use of cultural knowledge for interpreters

Cultural knowledge	Demands of associations registering interpreters	Demands of institutions using interpreters' services
Linguistic mediation	• **9 out of 12 give general or unclear instructions** (AUSIT; IMIA; UK ITI; ITIA ---general and community interpreting; UK NRPSI; UK APCI; CIoL; TAC) • **2 out of 12 point out strategies for dealing specific cultural issues** (ATA; NAJIT) • **1 out 12 have no mention** on what interpreters need to do with cultural issues (AIIC)	• **3 out 4 give general or unclear instructions (**London Metropolitan Police; UK NHS; Bristol City Council**)** • **1 out 4 points out strategies for dealing with specific cultural issues** (UK Visa and Immigration)

In all, as the data reveals, most associations and institutions provide only general rather than precise and practical guidelines on how interpreters should make use of their cultural knowledge during the course of their interpreting, if not using it for cultural mediation.

5. Conclusion and discussion

The data analysis in Section 4 shows that most professional associations registering interpreters and all institutions using interpreters' services require that interpreters do not act as cultural mediators at work, and that their cultural knowledge as cultural specialists is generally to be used only for linguistic mediation. This, therefore, points to a clear conclusion: interpreters are not cultural mediators, as bound by interpreters' codes of conduct.

The findings from the present study come as a surprise, as the author, also a lecturer in interpreting, originally was looking for evidence supporting the proposal that interpreters

also work as cultural mediators. Based on the current findings, the following points are worth further exploration:

(a) Cultural mediator is not a role that interpreters can take on automatically, and training will be needed if they are expected to play this role.

From Table 2, we can see that only three professional bodies consider the possibility of interpreters working as mediators, and at the same time they advise that interpreters inform clients of risks and that clients need to agree to those risks if they insist that interpreters do such work. This guideline takes a responsible approach in that it implies that cultural mediating is beyond interpreters' responsibility and possibly beyond their competence as well. Consequently, both interpreters and their clients will need to be aware of potential risks if interpreters are assigned this role at work. There is one association that asks interpreters to use their "professional judgement" when deciding to work as cultural mediators. As argued earlier, this approach does not free the interpreters from risks in the event that their involvement as cultural mediators gives rise to problems. Unless the interpreters bound by the code of conduct in question have already been trained as cultural mediators, it is doubtful that they have the "professional judgement" needed to work as a cultural mediator. This "professional judgement" of a cultural mediator is similar to what Pöchhacker (2008; See also Section 2 above) distinguishes as cognitive mediation. Only through professional training, is it possible to develop the cognitive ability to professionally judge when there is the need to mediate conflicts. According to Martín and Phelan (2009, p. 1),

> In the last six years cultural mediators have been trained in Ireland not to be interpreters but to help immigrants from other countries to access and use healthcare services as well as mediating in situations of conflict between health service providers and patients. Meanwhile, interpreters have been hired to bridge the language gap.

This is a good example that separates the role of interpreters from the role of cultural mediators, and more importantly highlights the need of training if interpreters are expected to work as cultural mediators so as to resolve conflicts between communicating parties as well as helping the latter with access to services. As mentioned in Section 2 above,

Pöchhacker (2008) expresses his concern that the profession of interpreting may be replaced by that of cultural mediators as in countries such as Italy, where a professional figure of the latter is preferred over that of the former. Martín and Phelan (2009) mention a similar scenario:

> In France, Italy and parts of Belgium and Germany the terms interpreter, cultural mediator and, also intercultural mediator are used interchangeably and the role boundaries are unclear, especially to outsiders (p.2).

It might the case that in all these countries mentioned in Pöchhacker (2008) and Martín and Phelan (2009), those who work as cultural mediators are in fact also trained as interpreters so that they develop the professional ability to judge when to interpret instead of mediating and when to mediate instead of interpreting. It thus follows that if interpreters are trained as cultural mediators in addition to their interpreting training, then we can ease the worry of Pöchhacker as our interpreters would be equipped with a new set of professional tools.

(b) Further studies are in need for interpreters to learn how to deal with cultural issues for linguistic mediation.

Cultural issues are unavoidable in intercultural communication. In translation literature, a considerable amount of research has been devoted to the issue of how to deal with cultural elements in written texts. However, some strategies may not be immediately transferrable to interpreting, which deals with oral texts. As illustrated earlier, the American Translators Association does not recommend paraphrasing or using long explanation for interpreting culturally specific terms, whereas in translation literature this is a legitimate strategy (e.g. Nida & Taber, 2003). Hence, we need to explore new plausible strategies for interpreters to render cultural issues. One way is to work with professional associations and institutions so that we can learn from professional interpreters who have registered with or worked for them. The other way is to work with professional bodies asking for their clarifications regarding the parts of their codes of conduct that concern cultural issues.

(c) Studies are needed so that we can learn about clients' expectations of interpreters.

The present study has selected four institutions in the UK that hire interpreters: Bristol City Council, London Metropolitan Police, the NHS and the UK Visa and Immigration Unit. Due to

the issue of accessibility, an important institution that is absent here is the UK business sector. Many scholars have studied the importance of cultural mediation in intercultural business interaction (e.g. Rădulescu & Mitrut, 2012; Hofstede, 2005). It would of great significance if research could be carried out along this line to reveal what businesses and/or business people expect their interpreters to do: interpreting, cultural mediating, or both.

Appendix 1: **The eleven professional associations registering interpreters**

American National Association of Judiciary Interpreters & Translators (NAJIT)
http://www.najit.org/about/NAJIT%20Code%20of%20Ethics%202014NEW.pdf

American Translators Association (ATA)
http://www.atanet.org/governance/code_of_ethics_commentary.pdf

The Association of Police and Court interpreters (APCI, UK)
http://www.apciinterpreters.org.uk/apci_interpreters_code_of_practice.aspx

The Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT)
http://ausit.org/AUSIT/Documents/Code_Of_Ethics_Full.pdf

Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIoL, UK)
http://www.ciol.org.uk/sites/default/files/CPC15.pdf

International Association of Conference Interpreter s(AIIC)
http://aiic.net/page/6724

International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA)
http://www.imiaweb.org/uploads/pages/376.pdf

Irish Translators and Interpreters Association (ITIA; two sets of codes of conduct, one for public services interpreters and the other for interpreters in general)
http://translatorsassociation.ie/component/option,com_docman/task,cat_view/gid,21/Itemid,61/

National Register of Public Services Interpreter (NRPSI, UK)

http://www.nrpsi.org.uk/for-clients-of-interpreters/code-of-prof essional-conduct.html

The UK Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI, UK)

http://www.iti.org.uk/attachments/article/154/Code%20of%20professional%20conduct%2008%20009%202013_Final.pdf

Translators Association of China: Specification for Translation Service------Part 2: Interpretation [TAC; 中华人民共和国国家: 标准: 翻译服务规范 第2部分：口译] GB/T 19363.2-2006

https://www.google.co.uk/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=%E7%BF%BB%E8%AF%91%E6%9C%8D%E5%8A%A1%E8%A7%84%E8%8C%83%E7%AC%AC2%E9%83%A8%E5%88%86%E5%8F%A3%E8%AF%91

Appendix 2: The four UK institutions using interpreters' services

Bristol City Council

https://www.bristol.gov.uk/people-communities/translation-and-interpreting

London Metropolitan Police

http://www.met.police.uk/foi/pdfs/policies/interpreters_and_translators_sop.pdf

NHS

https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2015/03/it_principles.pdf

UK Visa and Immigration Unit

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-conduct-interpreters-working-for-uk-visas-and-immigration

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