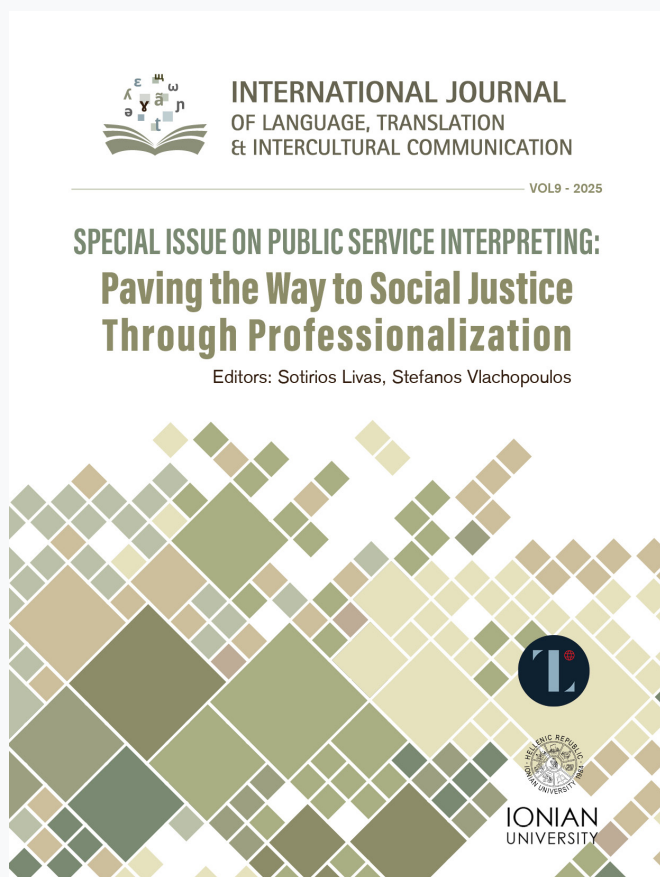


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## Interpreting for Public Services and the Community

Theodoros Vyzas

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# Interpreting for Public Services and the Community: towards conceptual accuracy and terminological stability

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## Abstract

*The aim of this article is to show that interpreting in public services is a highly important and demanding social and institutional interaction, and must be distinguished from community interpreting, which means that the term public service interpreting must be used in its own right.*

*The theoretical framework will comprise the interactionistic model (Wadensjö, 1995) and Marianacci's model (2022) of power asymmetries between public service professionals and "clients" in institutional context. Major features of interpreting such as accuracy, fidelity, impartiality and neutrality will be approached while pragmatic and socio-cultural aspects will also be discussed. Emphasis will be placed on public service settings and the power asymmetries they generate. As public service interpreting helps to balance power relations, it is indispensable to social justice, thus it must be conducted by professional interpreters.*

**Keywords:** public service interpreting, community interpreting, interaction, accuracy, impartiality, settings, power asymmetry

## 1 Introduction

Interpreting has always played an important role in history and everyday life, and interpreters have been "acting as catalysts for social change" (Corsellis, 2008:3; Takeda, 2007:6). Suffice it to say that it was a necessary activity in the expansion of empires: this was the case in China, Egypt, and ancient Greece. In Modern times, Spanish, Portuguese and English, among other conquerors and settlers, used interpreters "not only to communicate with the natives but to gain their trust" (Valdeón, 2021:442-443). During the Ottoman domination of the Balkans (15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries), the "dragomans" served the diplomatic relations between the Sultan and European ambassadors (Todorova, 2016:228). Referring to World War II, Probirskaja (2016:206) explains that "Soviet wartime interpreters have been given a significant and heroic connotation in Russia", while, more recently, in the 1990s, the role of interpreters in conflict zones in former Yugoslavia was crucial for "maintaining a relationship of trust" (Todorova, 2016:238). Since the 1960s, educational interpreting has been used in schools, aiming at the social integration of the deaf in the USA (Pöchhacker, 2004). Moreover, interpreting has significantly facilitated access of migrants and refugees to public services such as immigration offices and police stations, and during asylum procedures (Gez & Schuster 2018; Valero-Garcés, 2017; Gamal, 2014; Angelelli, 2008; Hale, 2007). What is more, media interpreting for migrants in the English premier league has been developed in the UK (Baines, 2018), while football press conferences are interpreter-mediated in Italy (Sandrelli, 2015). Multimodal types of interpreting, such as media interpreting and theatre interpreting, have also emerged (Rocks, 2015:417). Finally, religious interpreting, one of the earliest kinds of interpreting as it was first practised in Judaism in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, is still used in churches and synagogues (Tekgül, 2020; Kaufmann, 2005:976; Bowen et al., 1995:254).

As one can see, interpreting is a multifaceted activity occurring in innumerable situations with very different participants and in various ways.

More precisely, 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.” (Pöchhacker, 2013:62). This definition does not focus on language modality (e.g. spoken vs. written) but on temporal constraints so as to encompass both sign language interpreting and cross-modal variants, such as sight translation and live interlingual subtitling. The definition by Kunreuther & Rao (2023:241) casts some more light: “Interpreting is the practice of conveying meaning in a live interaction, from speech or sign language in one code into another code.” In this case, “live” means that “interpreting cannot be planned in advance, since the interval between the cognitive processing of the received text and the offering of the interpreted text is minimal. In fact, interpreting is planned during its own performance” (Rodrigues, 2018:301). Secondly, interpreting is considered as “interaction”. Finally, during interpreting “meaning” is conveyed in a dynamic way as discourse production activity (Pöchhacker, 2013:63). The original utterance must be translated faithfully, accurately with impartiality and neutrality. Confidentiality is another major characteristic of interpreting, but it will not be discussed in this article.

However, neither definition would be complete without the major classification criterion based on where interpreting is conducted. According to Pöchhacker (2004:10-13), interpreting can take place either at an inter-social level, namely between different societies, as, for example, in the case of diplomatic relations, or at an intra-social level, as in encounters with members of language minorities, immigrants and refugees. This means that interpreting is an event always embedded in a setting (Laver & Mason, 2020:124), in other words, situatedness is of ultimate importance: “who interprets for whom, why and when” (Pym, 2022:165).

This article will focus on intra-social spoken-language interpreting, aiming to make the difference between the terms *community interpreting* (CI) and *public service interpreting* (PSI), which, although used interchangeably, are not conceptually identical (Adler, 2023; Määttä, 2017). After an overview of the terminological multiplicity, pragmatic and socio-cultural aspects of interpreting will be approached. Characteristics such as accuracy, fidelity, impartiality and neutrality will be addressed in conjunction with the equivalence stereotype in Translation Studies. The importance of settings will be investigated as these generate various power asymmetries which impact on the participants’ relationship. Using the interactionistic model (Wadensjö, 1995) and Marianacci’s model (2022) of power asymmetries between public service professionals and “clients”, the article will try to show that PSI is a highly important social and institutional interaction which strongly depends on the settings (Vargas Urpi, 2012). Due to its status and characteristics, conference interpreting will not be discussed in this article.

## 2 Terminological multiplicity

This brief overview is the first stage of the approach of the terminological and conceptual instability and will be illustrated with some representative examples.

Terminological uncertainty is due to the parallel use of hypernyms and hyponyms or even putative synonyms for a long time, thus the historical dimension is certainly of importance. Furthermore, terms focusing on either the way interpreting is conducted, or the number of participants exacerbate the confusion.

In 1962, *liaison interpreting* was proposed as a term proper to commercial negotiations (Pöchhacker, 2004:14). It was later used as a hypernym of, more or less, all types of “non-professional interpreting” –that is, except conference interpreting– which are also known as *dialogue interpreting* or *ad hoc interpreting*, (Adler, 2023; Ozolins, 2014; Gentile et al., 1996). As the adjectival modifiers of these terms suggest, the concepts are not identical. More specifically, while *ad hoc* designates the unstated purpose or setting of interpreting and subsequently the interpreter’s lack of professional status, *liaison* is related to the alternation of speech. As for *dialogue*, it focuses on the number of interlocutors, ignoring the interpreter’s presence. What is more, none of these terms reveal any information as to who is concerned or where the encounters take place. It must be pointed out that these terms are sometimes used to designate even *business interpreting* and *escort interpreting*. However, despite their, occasionally, institutional aspect, as government officials or state institutions are often involved, interpreting in business and diplomatic settings are not intra-social types (Cho, 2021). Other terms focus either on the number of the parties involved like *bilateral* / *triad* / *triangle* interpreting or the settings like *institutional* / *court* / *public service(s)* / *medical* / *health care* / *educational* interpreting. Again, *institutional* and *public service* can be regarded as hypernyms of the others. Finally, by means of partial synonyms, some terms focus on the way interpreting is conducted, like *telephone* / *remote interpreting*, or the medium where interpreting is used: and *TV* / *broadcast* / *media* interpreting. Even if both television interpreting and remote interpreting are location-dependent, the communication circumstances are totally different (Straniero Sergio, 2011:XII).

However, according to the international literature, these terms are viewed as partially synonymous to or hyponyms of community interpreting or more rarely public service interpreting (Furmanek, 2010; Ozolins, 2014; Prieto Ramos, 2021).

The term *community interpreting* was most probably forged in Australia in the late 1960s and used in conjunction with terms such as *ethnic communities* and *community health* (Pöchhacker, 1999: 126). In the 1980s, this type of interpreting was consolidated and often referred to as *community-based interpreting* (Phelan, 2001:20). The term *public service interpreting* is more recent. The Institute of Linguists adopted it in the 2000s, in order to set apart trained interpreters from mostly untrained community interpreters in the UK, and “dissociate the term community from any possible reference to European Community” (Fragkou, 2023:4).

The same, more or less, instability is observed in French. Chwalczuk (2021:17-18) suggests using *interprétation de service public*, while Kasperska (2018) and Safar & Hmami (2014) prefer *interprétation en milieu social* (interpreting in social context), which is used both in France and French-speaking Belgium.

As far as distinctions are concerned, they depend on social structures and local cultures (Valero-Garcés, 2017:2). For some scholars, court interpreting must be distinguished from community interpreting (Valdés et al., 2003:25). Bancroft et al. (2013) distinguish even between court interpreting and legal interpreting, because, as they posit, court interpreting outside courtrooms displays common features with community interpreting. Valero-Garcés (2017) only uses the Spanish term *Traducción e Interpretación en los Servicios Públicos* and the English equivalent *Public Service Interpreting and Translation*, which she considers as more comprehensive as they comprise court interpreting and show the proximity of interpreting and translation in the public sector context.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies* (2015), the entry *Public Service Interpreting* refers the reader to *Community Interpreting*.

As it follows, opinions among scholars vary, so do terms, and obviously so do concepts.

The conceptual similarities and dissimilarities between community interpreting and public service interpreting will be discussed extensively in § 5.

### **3 Main features of interpreting**

#### **3.1 Interpreting as discourse activity**

##### **3.1.1 From equivalence theories to the sociological turn**

Until at least the 1980s, Translation Studies was mainly, if not exclusively, based on linguistic theories concerned with the equivalence between source text and target text (Romero-Fresco & Pöchhacker, 2017:156; Chesterman, 2016:167; Inghilleri, 2009:100). Translators and interpreters were ignored for a long time. This gave rise to a “machine model” (Baker-Shenk, 2014:4), according to which the interpreter is supposed to act as “a linguistic conduit” (González et al., 1991:156). This model is monological and regards interpreters as passive transmitters, thus totally invisible (Dahlvik, 2019:134), and “has long been associated with competence and professionalism” (Rusho, 2023:122). Ciordia (2017:276) argues that this transfer model seems to be increasingly rejected, even if considered as essential by numerous interpreters’ codes of conduct. This development is due to the birth of the sociological approach dating back to 1985 (Snell-Hornby, 2006:49). The way was paved long ago.

In the 1950s, Coseriu was most probably the first to focus on “the concept of speaking as activity”, which takes speakers and language use into consideration (Schrott, 2021:211). It becomes obvious that “the linguistic concept of language is considerably extended by emphasizing the crucial effects of human activity, of context and implicitly shared codes in establishing meaning” (Blommaert, 2011:123). As Austin (1962/1975:148) explains, we need to consider “the total speech act in the total speech situation”. All these aspects constitute “the individuality of speaking in specific situations” (Schrott, 2021:211).

Some years later, this led to translation and interpreting being very gradually studied from the cognitive point of view of in the 1960s and the 1970s (Evans et al., 2007:2) due to their encounter with cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics (Gerver, 1975; Chernov, 1979; Seleskovitch & Lederer, 2001). In the 1970s, sociologists and social anthropology scholars as well as psychologists and experts in law became interested in interlingual and intercultural communication (Angelelli, 2014:1; Pöllabauer, 2006:240; Vargas-Urpi, 2011:47; Coulthard et al., 2010:529). This sociological turn of Translation Studies took interpreters and translators out of their invisibility and gave rise to the interactionistic model devised by Wadensjö (1995:113-114). This construct considers interpreting as social activity.

##### **3.1.2 Interpreting as interaction and co-construction of meaning in specific settings, or the interpreter’s power**

Anderson (1976:209) was perhaps the first researcher to argue that interpreting, as any kind of communication, takes place in social situations, which need to be analysed from a sociological

point of view. This is the basis of the interactionistic model, according to which discourse and meaning are constantly co-constructed between speaker and hearer(s) in interaction in specific settings. This means that all three, namely the interlocutors and the interpreter, change roles constantly becoming speakers and hearers. In other words, the physical presence of the interpreter is definitely recognised in this tripartite interaction (Wadensjö, 1995:113-114; Skaaden & Wadensjö, 2014:17; Delizée, 2021:89). All parties involved participate with linguistic and extra-linguistic variables, which means not only by speaking but multimodally, as people assign meaning to gestures, postures and body movement, facial expressions, settings and the material environment in various combinations. Many intrinsic characteristics of spoken language, such as deixis, pronoun use, implicitness, loose syntax redundancy and varying register, are related to the situatedness of speech and vary, depending on the context and circumstances of production (Tiittula, 2015:292; Le Poder, 2014:115). All these elements constitute complex communicative circumstances that decisively influence the way utterances are shaped, and discourse is structured and perceived (Blommaert & Rampton, 2016:27). Being able to use both languages equally well, interpreters are not mere animators but authors who are responsible for the smooth flow and conduct of the communication between the parties involved (Kunreuther & Rao, 2023:245). They do not act as neutral conduits of messages; instead, they omit passages, change the style by emphasising specific content or rearranging parts of the oral text, modify the length of the utterances by summarising instead of rendering everything that is said, do not indicate verbal feedback reactions and, generally, proceed to considerable editing (Wadensjö, 1998:75; Wande, 1994:124-125; Tommola & Lindholm, 1995:130). In other words, the interpreter “always has the possibility to influence the text” (Fischer & Jensen, 2012:12) and consequently “is in control of the encounter” (Wadensjö, 1995:127).

It goes without saying that interpreting practices “create points of commonality and coordination across different participants’ conceptual frameworks”, through inevitable interventions. Consequently, the interaction that occurs “is freighted with extrasemantic meanings about the social relation between the mutually incomprehending participants” (Stasch, 2015:89-91). Interpreters can even change “the speaker’s intentions and intended purposes” (Nartowska, 2015:30). All this is what makes their power.

But there are some prerequisites to this kind of power: accuracy and fidelity, impartiality and neutrality, while settings have a strong impact on the interaction (Dahlvik, 2019:135).

## **4 Some critical features**

### **4.1 Accuracy and fidelity**

Accuracy has always been considered as a major characteristic of interpreting (Niska, 2002:138; Gieshoff & Albl-Mikasa, 2024:210) and a primary criterion of interpreting quality (Ehrensberger-Dow et al., 2020:227; Setton, 2015:162) which is a “difficult notion” (Cox & Salaets, 2019:2). Accuracy means that all linguistic units of the utterances are translated adequately, thus it is equivalent to completeness. Despite the reliability of unit-based accuracy analysis, as Tiselius (2015:4) explains, “if meaning is co-constructed in a dialogic interpreting context, then at least part of the accuracy is too”, as each participant “may understand information differently, depending on their social, cultural and economic background”.

As far as fidelity –in conjunction with accuracy– is concerned, Moody (2011:41) asserts that “as long as the original message is synthesized accurately, all of the words need not be expressed in a faithful interpreted rendition”. The interpreter should transmit the informational content by being faithful to the meaning, not the words (Seleskovitch & Lederer, 2001:90), and the target language utterances should be “natural and native-like”. As it has already been shown, interpreting is a discourse process depending on choices, and this perspective “influences our view of a faithful interpretation.” (Moody, 2011:44).

#### 4.2 Impartiality and neutrality

The concept of accuracy is closely related to impartiality in the sense that the lack of impartiality has a negative impact on accuracy (Zimanyi, 2009:58-59). In other words, “accuracy requires impartiality” (Baixauli-Olmos, 2017:261).

Neutrality and impartiality are considered as core tenets of interpreting, yet intertwined with invisibility, as the interpreter is supposed to act as “an unobtrusive conduit” (Rusho, 2023:122), thus related to the conduit model.

Some authors use these two terms indiscriminately, while others differentiate between them, yet the conceptual landscape remains nebulous (Prunč & Setton, 2015:273). However, Zimanyi (2009:57) and Balounová (2021:16) assert that these are two distinct but closely related concepts. Arcambal (2022:48-49) defines neutrality and impartiality as follows: a) neutral attitude: the interpreter must neither deliberately intervene in the substance of the exchanges nor give his/her opinion even if the interlocutors ask him/her to do so; and b) impartial attitude: the interpreter treats the interlocutors equally without favouring either side at the expense of the other.

Neutrality can also be interpreted as providing equal services to all participants, such as giving cultural explanations and advice for negotiation, and facilitating communication in any way (Prunč & Setton, 2015:273), while Zimanyi (2009:58-59) explains that neutrality is culture-bound, thus perceived differently depending on the country.

Some researchers prefer the term *loyalty*. Salaets & Balogh (2015:206) have introduced the term *double loyalty* of the interpreter, who, as a person in the middle, is situated between two loyalties. This is what Gile (2009:35) defines as rotating side-taking principle.

Whatever the case, neutrality and impartiality should not be taken for granted as interpreters function within various socio-political and institutional settings rather than as neutral parties outside of the system. Consequently, their behaviour is constrained and shaped by the settings in which they work (Mellinger, 2020:94), which means that the equilibrium of a sincere professional relationship with their interlocutors is not always easy to achieve (Arcambal, 2022:48-49).

#### 4.3 The importance of settings

As already mentioned, more often than not, interpreting for various language communities takes place in public service settings. Although medical, educational, legal interpreting or interpreting in asylum hearings seem to have strong common grounds from a linguistic and cognitive point of view, there are important differences in the settings where interpreting occurs and among the co-participants (Angelelli, 2004:24). This strongly affects the role of the interpreter, which has been studied by various researchers on the basis of empirical evidence. They all aim to measure, above

all, the impartiality of the interpreter in conjunction with the accuracy of the renderings. Depending on his/her background and interests, each scholar has devised a theoretical scheme, and although there are commonalities between these approaches, there are also some mismatches due to the multifaceted nature of community interpreting.

Here are three examples which are quite comprehensive and eloquent.

According to Roberts' "philosophical" model (1997:10-15) for community interpreting in general, the interpreter's role can range from active participation, when the interpreter coordinates the interaction, to conciliation, as in cases of serious conflicts. Between the two extremes, there are three stages, as the interpreter can also: a) be of assistance to someone who is not proficient in the official language, b) act as a cultural broker or cultural mediator when s/he must give explanations about cultural matters or terminology, and c) act as an advocate when s/he actively supports the client.

Weiss & Stucker (1998:43-50) have developed a four-level model for the interpreter's role in mental health sessions: s/he can act as a) word-for-word translator, that is remain invisible, b) cultural mediator, which, among other things, encompasses verbal and non-verbal communication, terminology management and even knowledge of the legal framework of the country, c) patient's advocate, when the interpreter in a way enhances the client's utterances, or d) co-therapist, when the interpreter participates in a more dynamic way, more or less as the doctor's assistant.

Finally, as far as legal interpreting is concerned, Hale (2007:102-118), distinguishes between five possible roles for the interpreter: a) advocate for the minority language speaker, which is more or less the equivalent to Robert's advocate, b) advocate for the institution or service provider, which means that the minority language speaker is rather scorned, c) gatekeeper, when the interpreter is not always impartial and often omits utterances and information or even gives advice, d) facilitator of communication, when the interpreter tries to assist both parties, and e) faithful renderer of others' utterances, when the interpreter does not translate word for word but focuses on the meaning of what is said, without favouring either party.

As the researchers explain about their models, the role levels cannot be clearly distinguished from one another, as the interaction often fluctuates between levels. A classic example is the case of healthcare interpreting: scholars remark that interpreting moves constantly between faithful translation and mediation (Duman, 2021:119; Chambon & Carbonel, 2015:90; Mikkelsen, 2008:85), which is not tolerated in legal interpreting.

#### 4.3.1 Power relations in public service settings

Now let us focus on some particularities of the public sector.

The public sector makes "the state visible to its citizens, often forming the principal tangible link between governments and their people. Public services carry and diffuse the values of the new nations" (Van de Walle & Scott, 2009:9). But these values are co-created by the public sector and its customers (Cui & Aulton, 2023:8). As the public sector delivers services to people, the general idea of service as an abstract noun is "the general process of applying one's resources for the benefit of another actor" (Vargo et al., 2017:118). According to the 'actor-to-actor' approach (Vargo et al., 2015), value is created by the exchange of services between the public sector and the citizens, which means reconfigured social relations through redistribution of power

(Inghilleri, 2005:76). These new relations are necessary for social justice and peace. People not speaking the official language who turn to public services need empowerment, which is only provided through interpreting, and as Sadan (1997:125) asserts, social reality and human activity are essential features of empowerment strategies. Vargo et. al. (2017) subsequently argued for the necessity of understanding the context of customers, their prior experiences, needs and social milieu, as value is co-created ‘in-context’, as well as ‘in-use’ (Cui & Aulton, 2023:8).

Power is closely connected with discourse and ideology (Fairclough, 1995:24) and is intrinsic to the relations between states and their languages (Heilbron & Sapiro, 2007). On the other hand, public services are social settings that generate specific behaviours (Kara & Nordberg 2023, Holahan & Moos, 2001). As far as power relations in interpreting and translation are concerned, they were only dealt with in the late 1990s, when interpreters and translators came out of their invisibility (Pym, 2004) due to the sociological turn already mentioned. Especially in interpreting, power is intertwined with the settings (Kalina, 2015). As Rudvin (2005) asserts, two kinds of power are intrinsic to institutional contexts: power in discourse and power behind discourse. More specifically, there is power asymmetry between the participants in the communication at various levels, and it is obvious that the public official’s power is different from the interpreter’s power (Kasperska, 2018:8).

As already explained, “the interpreter takes control of the situation, with the aim of establishing communication between the parties concerned” (Rudvin, 2005:173). This means that the interpreter holds part of the power during interpreting in public services, as power is negotiated interpersonally through discourse (Mason & Ren, 2012). In other words, the interpreter takes hold of the situation through a complex interaction. Álvarez & Vidal (1996:6) assert that the multilayered concept of power “is intimately related to knowledge, information, and especially to the manner in which that information is conveyed and the way of articulating a wide range of discursive elements in the TT [target text] which behave according to extremely subtle strategies.”

This approach sheds light on the concept of *power behind discourse*, as defined by Rudvin (2005:163): everything that consolidates the institution’s/representative’s role in their gate-keeping function and augments the power asymmetries. The public official represents the government –and consequently a certain ideology– and s/he also holds the information the client needs so as to have access to a specific social service; that is what makes him/her more powerful than the other two parties of the triadic communication context (Cho, 2021:5). As for the interpreter, s/he is also powerful behind discourse as s/he “functions as a double agent caught between two camps”: s/he represents both the state entity and the person seeking empowerment (Fischer & Jensen, 2012:12). As Dahlvik (2019:134) claims, interpreters are active agents during mediated encounters especially in public services and often in a more powerful position than public officials would want them to be.

But power relations –power relations behind discourse in the first place– do not remain unchanged: their fluidity is indubitable. In court interpreting, judges and lawyers “are forced to cede part of their power to the interpreter” (Nartowska, 2015:12). Especially in interpreting for asylum seekers, interpreters have unquestionable power as the whole procedure is highly codified and they can intervene at various stages, while there is the particularity that asylum seekers have a right of preference in terms of the interpreter’s gender (Pian, 2022: 3-4; Norström & Norberg, 2012: 12-16). Finally, another kind of power behind discourse can be observed in legal interpreting, where there is “almost always power inequality between legal professionals, who are

formally authorised by institutions (e.g. judges and lawyers), and laypeople (e.g. the defendant and the accused)” (Cho, 2021:5). Of course, power in discourse can vary too. A typical example is that of remote interpreting in comparison to face-to-face interpreting. In the former, the interpreter cannot fully perceive and appreciate extra-linguistic features, which means that s/he loses part of his/her power (Braun, 2013).

To sum up, “power, the ability to act, is something you may have in one situation and not in another” (Baker-Shenk, 2014:2), observation which perfectly applies to interpreting. But let’s have a closer look at the concepts of community interpreting and public service interpreting.

## **5 Community interpreting or Public service interpreting?**

With millions of people moving around the world every year, community interpreting has become particularly widespread. That is why various broad definitions have been proposed. These encompass “interpreting that takes place informally in neighbourhoods and community agencies as performed by amateurs or ad hoc interpreters”, as well as “a more formal occupation involving practitioners with some training in medical, legal or social service interpreting” (Ciordia, 2017:273). *Ad hoc* or natural interpreters are volunteers without any kind of training beyond the fact that they are supposed to be bilingual (Harris, 1976; Niska, 2002:136). They are often members of the family or friends of the client, and the vast majority of them belong to the same linguistic and ethnic community, so they have an insider’s knowledge of the culture (Mahdavi, 2020:20; Hlavac, 2011:3-4; Grbić & Pöllabauer, 2006:254).

A more restrictive definition, which also refers to the terminological multiplicity already addressed, is the following: “Community interpreting –also known as public service interpreting, liaison interpreting, or dialogue interpreting– is a type of interpreting offered to people who are not fluent speakers of the official language(s) of a country to enable them to communicate with public services providers” (Tymczyńska, 2010:111). But some historical information is again necessary.

When only conference interpreting was theoretically recognised as real interpreting, Roberts (1994 cited in Mikkelsen, 2004) attempted perhaps the first serious approach of community interpreting features as follows: “1) Community interpreters primarily serve to ensure access to public services, and are therefore likely to work in institutional settings; 2) they are more apt to be interpreting dialogue-like interactions than speeches; 3) they routinely interpret into and out of both or all of their working languages; 4) the presence of the community interpreter is much more noticeable in the communication process than is that of the conference interpreter; 5) a great many languages, many of them minority languages that are not the language of government in any country, are interpreted at the community level, unlike the limited number of languages of international diplomacy and commerce handled by conference and escort interpreters; and 6) community interpreters are often viewed as advocates or “cultural brokers” who go beyond the traditional neutral role of the interpreter”.

One can see that the first point concerns the settings, and the second point has to do with interpreting as interaction while in the sixth point the neutral role of the interpreter is characterised as traditional. Moreover, although public services are referred to as the most usual context where interpreting occurs, the aspect of power relations is not addressed, at least not explicitly.

Twenty years later, in the definition proposed in ISO 13611:2014(en) Interpreting — Guidelines for community interpreting (2014)<sup>1</sup>, the term *Community interpreting* appears first followed by the term *Public service interpreting*. Moreover, as it is specified, “Community interpreting may involve both private and public services” and “Community interpreting is not limited to accessing social services and includes, for example, services to tourists and disaster victims.” In other words, public service interpreting is viewed as a subset of community interpreting.

This conceptual looseness indicates that there are no safe criteria as to which types of interpreting can be categorised under community interpreting.

Marianacci (2022:162) tries to codify the community interpreting aspects which interact with one another as follows: (a) individual, as the stakeholder has a specific personal demand and requires satisfaction; (b) institutional, as the stakeholder is confronted with the state, which alone can provide satisfaction; and (c) socio-political, as, according to Koskinen (2014:480), power is presumably exercised by people of higher social classes, while minorities, migrants and refugees belong to the lower classes.

This model is in line with Kasperska’s approach (2018:8) to the three aspects of community interpreting in public services. She explains: Firstly, it concerns the personal situation of a subject who, for example, has to appear before a court or seek medical advice; secondly, each individual (either the interpreter or the speakers) belongs to an ethnic or social community whose life is governed by laws; and thirdly, interpreting is a professional practice that inevitably takes place in an institutional and, therefore, collective context.

Both models indicate that power relations are omnipresent, and even interpreter’s high proficiency in two languages is not sufficient for balancing power relations, as it has been shown. As Valero-Garcés & Gauthier Blasi (2010) assert, interpreting in public services is very demanding in terms of accuracy, fidelity, impartiality and confidentiality among other parameters, as the interests of the stakeholders are potentially at risk. This means that only trained and certified interpreters can conduct interpreter-mediated encounters.

These conceptual features must be reflected on the term used in the best possible way (Kocourek, 1985). This is the case with the term *public service interpreting (PSI)* and that is why it must be used in its own right.

From a terminological point of view, public service interpreting is more explicit in that it designates the interpreter-mediated encounters taking place in settings as diverse as courts, police stations, hospitals and schools. At the same time, it implicitly refers to power relations between the public sector and the language communities. The term *PSI* is also used by the European Union. In contrast, *community* in community interpreting only suggests that this type of interpreting concerns language and cultural groups without revealing anything about settings, which as shown, are critical to interpreting.

Finally, as far as distinctions are concerned, *PSI* can be used as an umbrella-term, as it encompasses interpreting in all public sector, including hospitals, courts, immigration offices and asylum procedure. As the specific needs of encounters in each public service must be taken into consideration, Valero-Garcés (2017) claims that scholars must identify the unique specialisations

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/es/#iso:std:iso:13611:ed-1:v1:en>

and methods that characterise this field and contribute to its establishment as a profession. Professionalisation is a *sine qua non* for public service interpreters.

## Conclusion

As Cabré (1998:168) claims, a good conceptual description must take into account the features that enable scholars to distinguish between concepts. Accurate conceptual descriptions lead to adequate definitions and terminological stability.

Given the above and after the effort to elucidate the major concepts and terms, the public service interpreter could be defined as a professional language service provider who aims to facilitate the access of non-official language speakers to the provision of a service. The interpreter balances the power relationship between the public sector and the client by conveying information through spoken or sign language to both parties alternately, with linguistic competence, accuracy, completeness, impartiality, neutrality and confidentiality.

In view of this profile, the qualities of a professional interpreter must be the basis of interdisciplinary training programmes for professional public service interpreters as well as for interpreters' codes of ethics. The redistribution of power will then be smoothly achieved, and as a result, social justice and peace will be promoted.

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