

## INTERPRETER ROLE (SELF-)PERCEPTION: A MODEL AND AN ASSESSMENT TOOL

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### Abstract

Ongoing discussion continues to debate the role interpreters should embrace, whether the interpreter should be an impartial agent or whether impartiality can be demanded from a human agent at all. The current discussion favours the idea that roles are negotiated through interaction and that the ideal of impartiality may be compromised in specific situations or settings. This negotiation, far from constituting an academic discussion, is determined by the parties to the communicative situation. It is therefore relevant to be able to assess interpreters' and users' views as to what a particular situation requires of the interpreter. Based on a content analysis of the existing literature on the interpreter's role, we developed a model to account for opposing perceptions of what interpreters are and should do in their professional practice, and represent those views as possibilities on a continuum rather than as opposing and excluding options. This paper presents a tool based on that model which allows perceptions to be made explicit and discussed. The model and preliminary experiences of the application of the tool in interpreting teaching and in one professional context are presented.

**Keywords:** interpreter's role; role negotiation; professional ethics; impartiality; neutrality; fidelity; mediation.

## L'(AUTO)PERCEPCIÓ DEL ROL DE LA INTÈRPRET: UN MODEL I UNA EINA D'AVUACIÓ

### Resum

*Continua el debat per establir quin rol haurien d'adoptar les intèrprets, si la intèrpret hauria de ser una agent imparcial o fins i tot si es pot exigir imparcialitat a una agent humana. El debat actual és partidari de la idea que els rols es negocien mitjançant la interacció i que l'ideal d'imparcialitat pot quedar compromès en algunes situacions o entorns específics. Aquesta negociació, lluny de representar un debat acadèmic, la determinen les parts de la situació comunicativa. Per tant, és rellevant que es puguin avaluar els punts de vista de les intèrprets i de les usuàries respecte del que una situació concreta requereix d'una intèrpret. A partir d'una anàlisi del contingut de la bibliografia existent sobre el rol de la intèrpret, hem creat un model per explicar les percepcions oposades sobre el que són les intèrprets i el que han de fer en la seva pràctica professional, i per representar els punts de vista com a possibilitats en un continuïum, més que no pas com a opcions contràries i excloents. Aquest article presenta una eina basada en aquest model que permet fer explícites les percepcions i reflexionar al respecte. Es presenten el model i les experiències preliminars de l'aplicació de l'eina en l'ensenyament de la interpretació i en un context professional.*

*Paraules clau:* rol de l'intèrpret; negociació del rol; ètica professional; imparcialitat; neutralitat; fidelitat; mediació.

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## Introduction: role perception in public service interpreting

What role does the public service interpreter play in communicative interactions? Is there a role he or she *should* play? These are frequent questions in interpreting studies that have been problematised by many authors in different contexts and settings (Angermeyer, 2005; Baraldi & Gavioli, 2015; Mason, 2009; McDermid, 2010; Merlini & Favaron, 2005). Academics are not alone in challenging old assumptions, and professionals have also been shown to depart from traditional models of impartiality. The complexities of the topic have major implications for academics, professionals and professional associations, as well as for policy planners and users, as will be explored in this paper.

If public service interpreters only needed to be aware of what the parties *actually* say during a given communicative interaction, they would only have to worry about translating as literally as possible. However, in addition to understanding the interaction at the most obvious and literal level, i.e. what has been said, that is, the locutionary act, (Austin, 1962), interpreters are trained to be aware of the illocutionary act, i.e. what the parties *meant*, and thanks to their skills, training and experience, interpreters are usually aware of the norms that dictate what the parties *should* say (or should have said) in order to achieve the desired perlocutionary act (Inghilleri, 2003: 258; Valero & Gauthier, 2010: 106). Identifying these three levels can be relatively easy for professional interpreters, but a greater problem arises when the original message needs to be reproduced in the target language. It is impossible to simultaneously convey the requirements of all three levels and decisions must therefore be made to prioritise one over the others. At such moments, interpreters' (and users') notions of fidelity and impartiality may be at stake, and certain deviations from a superficial equivalence to deliver the original's illocutionary force can be misconstrued by untrained individuals as a violation of the ethical principle of fidelity. On the other hand, an interpreter may use deviations to advocate for one of the parties, thus actually failing to fulfil the principle of impartiality.

According to Angelelli (2004: 47), it is challenging to establish what is ethical, reasonable and feasible when discussing the issue of the interpreter's role, which has been a topic of heated debate for over four decades now (Anderson, 1976, 1978). It came up in the first Critical Link International Conference (Roberts, 1997: 20) and, according to Diriker (2004: 2), has been the subject of studies in different areas related to public service interpreting. But this question is not only important for professionals and researchers; we often disregard the fact that interpreter users also have a say in the matter. Moreover, all parties involved in mediated communication, whether consciously or unconsciously, have a notion of what they think the interpreter's role should be (Fowler, 1997: 195-196; Inghilleri, 2003: 254; Wadensjö, 1998: 150) and, regardless of whether or not these ideas are realistic, they are relevant. The expectations of users, as non-experts in communication, may, however, conflict with what the communicative act requires or with what is actually feasible for interpreters (Gentile, Ozolins, & Vasilakakos, 1996: 31). Interpreters are frequently unaware of the parties' notions of what an interpreter knows, does or is *able* to do, and users only provide feedback when they perceive something as inappropriate (Inghilleri, 2003: 256). Their perceptions are, therefore, part of the negotiation processes and relevant in any academic discussion.

When public service interpreters themselves are asked to define their role, no unanimous consensus exists beyond the transmission of information across languages (Angelelli, 2004: 47-48; Pöchhacker, 2000: 63). Nonetheless, they usually appreciate that their role is not restricted to merely translating. Interpreters' notions of what their role should be are conditioned by norms they have embraced over the years, both consciously and unconsciously (Inghilleri, 2003: 259), as well as the realities and demands of the domain

in which they have acquired their professional experience. Interpreters have consciously embraced some of these norms during their training, and possibly as a result of their adherence to a specific code of conduct. Their professional experience and the behaviours they have observed over time have also directly influenced their internalisation of other norms (Gentile et al., 1996: 31), in this case, mostly unconsciously. However, different studies have revealed discrepancies between the norms declared by interpreters and the needs of the profession. Most interestingly, discrepancies have been pointed out between the norms declared by interpreters and what they actually do in the field (Anderson, 1978; Bot, 2003: 34; Inghilleri, 2003: 257; Valero & Gauthier, 2010: 8; Wadensjö, 1998: 8). This might be related, among other possibilities, to the interpreters' need to protect themselves from face-threatening actions, as suggested by Pöllabauer (2004).

As for researchers, most of them would agree that interpreting always entails a certain degree of mediation, as pointed out by Wadensjö (1998: 206): "Whether interpreters are translators or mediators is not an empirical question: they cannot avoid being both". Authors like Nakane (2009) even suggest that the idea of an interpreter who merely acts as an invisible mediator is a myth. Pöchhacker (2008: 9) acknowledges that mediation is a key aspect in understanding the controversies surrounding the concept of role in community interpreting, and identifies three dimensions of mediation in interpreting: linguistic/cultural, cognitive and contractual.

When the interpreter's role in an interaction needs to be *negotiated*, the issue for all the actors involved can be summed up with the following question, qualified from a literature-based stance: What degree of mediation is adequate and realistic, without compromising the near-universal ethical principles of impartiality or neutrality and fidelity?<sup>1</sup> According to Bot (2003: 34), finding the answer is a matter of not allowing transgressions to become violations. In their efforts to propose solutions for this problem, authors have put forward different role prototypes for interpreters that can be placed along an imaginary continuum according to the degree of mediation involved (Pöchhacker, 2008: 13).

A primary problem in an analysis of these solutions is the lack of consistency in the terminology used in the literature to refer to the interpreters' role (Roy, 1993). The terminology includes categories and metaphors such as "active participant", "assistant", "cultural broker", "advocate", "conciliator" (Roberts, 1997: 10-14); "middleman", "broker", "go-between", "gatekeeper" (Wadensjö, 1998: 63-68); "clarifier", "explainer", "cultural mediator", "helpmate", and "agent" (Pöchhacker, 2000: 65). An additional problem, according to Wadensjö (1998: 83), is that most classifications are usually prescriptive, so that, rather than aiming to describe reality, they present prototypical, unrealistic ways of acting. As for descriptive classifications, clear-cut roles may not cater for the diversity of needs and circumstances of any given communicative situation, since different fields may require different actions from the interpreter (Angelelli, 2004: 47). Dialogue interpreting in the public service sector covers such a great variety of situations that it is difficult to specify behavioural requirements (Gentile et al., 1996: 37), though in fields such as court interpreting, some roles have been prescribed or deduced from performance (Hale, 2008: 102).

## 1 A non-prescriptive role perception continuum

Only a non-prescriptive approach to role in public service interpreting can do justice to the complexity of the matter, in line with proposals like the diagrammatic tool devised by Zimányi (2009), or the notion of Role-Space coined by Llewellyn-Jones and Lee (2013), which further avoids clear-cut role prototypes. This paper will take the oppositions identified in the literature on interpreters' roles to build a multi-layered continuum that –it will be argued– may be used to describe any role interpreters can play as a relative position. The study underlying this proposal was presented in Aguirre Fernández Bravo & Roca Ugorri (2015) and consisted of a content analysis of over 40 references in the existing literature on role in public service interpreting. The oppositions were identified and semantically grouped. The results of analysing the current state of the art allowed the authors to identify nine subscales affecting the degree of mediation exerted by the interpreter. Following previous studies (Alexieva, 1997), the subscales are construed as parts of the same continuum. The proposal, as previously stated, is based on the current state of the art and is therefore designed to enable further elaboration with additional parameters. This descriptive model has been taken as the basis to design a tool to assess perceptions of the interpreter's role.

<sup>1</sup> As defined in Setton and Dawrant (2016a: 374-385).

For each subscale, the opposing poles are the *conduit* and the *advocate* interpreters. This opposition has been expressed by similar and different prototypical dichotomies in the literature: “conduit” versus “expert witness” (Fenton, 1997: 33); “paragon” versus “intruder” in court interpreting (Fowler, 1997); “impartial model” versus “advocacy model” (Cambridge, 2003: 57-58), or “scrupulous translator” versus “cultural mediator” (Eraslan Gercek, 2008), among others. The terminology selected in this tool, however, does not represent previously described categories, but should be understood as tags describing extreme positions on each of the subscales.

The definition of the conduit interpreter in this model is a public service interpreter who merely attends to the parties’ language needs, aspiring to a maximal lexical fidelity to the original (Venuti, 2004: 30), regardless of the parties’ interests. The advocate interpreter in the model proposed in this paper, on the other hand, goes beyond language transfer to perform additional tasks deemed necessary by the interpreter, such as advising the parties or balancing the power differential between them. We will now proceed to review each subscale by applying the conduit vs. advocate dichotomy to outline each dimension.

### 1.1 Subscale 1: interpreter’s role in Jakobson’s classic communication model

Following the terminology used in Jakobson’s information theory (1960), interpreters can be understood as either mere receivers having minimal impact on the production of the message and its understanding (conduit), or as yet another participant in the communicative event, sequentially playing the roles of receiver and sender during the course of communication (where extreme active participation would be herein referred to as *advocate*).

Conduit interpreters are therefore perceived as “non-persons” by authors such as Wadensjö (1998: 66), building on Goffman’s taxonomy of discrepant roles (1959). As a personification of the conduit through which the message is conveyed, conduit interpreters must not participate in communication. Instead, they must act as if they were not there, and their presence must neither interfere with nor alter communication in any way. Conduit interpreters resemble Goffman’s idea of the servant role (1959: 151): punctual, menial, and without opinion or initiative.

Advocate interpreters, on the other hand, assume the dual role of sender-receiver, and thus become third actors and participants in the communicative act. This, as Angelelli reminds us, entails agency (2004: 49). The advocate interpreter’s model is that of multidisciplinary advisor: they believe there are various essential active functions, beyond the mere transmission of literal meaning, that they need to perform to do their job properly.

### 1.2 Subscale 2: interpreter’s view of communication

As set out in Wadensjö (1998: 7-8), Linnell (1994: 52) identifies two ways of understanding human communication: the transfer (conduit) model, which is monologic, and the social-interactionist model, which is dialogic.

Conduit interpreters see communication as monologic and therefore focus solely on the sender, who produces a univocal message that is not influenced by the receiver’s understanding, since his or her role is merely passive. Following this view, interpreters can convey meaning without modifying it, as sense exists as an objective entity, regardless of the receiver. Interaction coordination and mediation would be perceived as unnecessary and beyond the scope of the interpreter’s role.

For anyone who sees interpreting as an interactive process, however, the conduit view constitutes an idealisation (Berk-Seligson, 2002: 220). Advocate interpreters adopt a dialogic communication model. In dialogic communication, both sender and receiver are active in negotiating meaning in a cooperative and reciprocal way. Advocate interpreters act as senders and receivers in the communicative act, and therefore co-participate in the negotiation process. From this point of view, coordinating communication and mediating are essential to establishing a dialogue.

### 1.3 Subscale 3: interpreter’s management of multiculturalism

Conduit interpreters assume that monolingual, monocultural situations are the norm in communication in the public service sector (Valero & Gauthier, 2010: 9), and perceive multilingualism and multiculturalism as nothing but obstructions to be removed as quickly as possible. Since the communicative act is perceived as a monocultural reality belonging to a single culture, there is no need for interpreters to mediate or adapt its

dynamics; interpreters need only follow the norms of the culture in which the communicative act takes place, in other words, those of the majority or of the most powerful interlocutor. Taken to the extreme, this view leads to unrealistic expectations that normal misunderstandings and inefficiency will disappear altogether, merely because of the presence of an interpreter (Fowler, 1997: 196).

Multilingualism and multiculturalism are seen by advocate public service interpreters as realities societies must adapt to. These interpreters believe they are responsible for assisting the parties in managing multiculturalism, because they have the ability and the potential to do so. They try to contribute to creating an ad hoc middle ground between the two cultures involved. This implies that both parties will have to compromise and make concessions. Advocate interpreters are willing to embrace intercultural noise (Chen, 2007) and its obstacles as natural elements to be overcome in the course of interpreter-mediated events.

#### 1.4 Subscale 4: interpreter's balancing of power relations

In every society, according to Bourdieu (1980), individuals compete for access to common capital, whether financial, social, cultural, or symbolic. This competition arises because of the scarcity of goods and the inequitable distribution of capital. If we transpose Bourdieu's view to public service interpreting, we see that power is asymmetrically distributed between an institutionalised majority and a potentially marginalised minority. In these communicative situations, the most powerful interlocutor acts as "gatekeeper" (Davidson, 2000), deciding whether the minority gets access to common capital or not. The parties also have unequal levels of knowledge of institutional proceedings, to which we can add an uneven distribution of speaking turns and of taking the initiative in communication.

Conduit interpreters do not consider themselves responsible for the balancing of power relations between the parties; they remain neutral, merely translating utterances. In doing so, they comply with the communication rules accepted (and expected) by the most powerful interlocutor (the majority), making no adjustments for the benefit of those who are not familiar with them (the minority). By aligning themselves with the most powerful interlocutor, then, they become gatekeepers, blocking the minority's access to social capital.

Advocate interpreters, however, accept that complete neutrality (understood in terms of loyalty, as it is most commonly used in the literature, according to Prunč & Setton, 2015: 273) is impossible to achieve in their interaction with the parties. They are aware that their performance may be crucial to the power dynamic between the actors. Consequently, they must make conscious decisions regarding the type of power relation they wish to favour. If conduit interpreters act as gatekeepers, advocate interpreters are the *keys to the gate*, acting as the means by which minorities can access social capital.

#### 1.5 Subscale 5: interpreter visibility

Our proposal understands interpreter visibility in the same terms used by Venuti (1995) for translators: the more the intervention or manipulation of the message goes unnoticed by the user, the more the interpreter is invisible.

As suggested by Inghilleri (2003: 259-260), and by Valero and Gauthier (2010: 9), conduit interpreters claim that their influence should be invisible in the message and, if possible, the communicative event should unfold as if it were a non-mediated exchange. Should the interpreter consider it imperative to alter the literal meaning, they will do so without declaring this to the parties, who will therefore continue to feel as if communication had not been altered in any way.

Advocates support the visibility of interpreters. Consequently, they do not hide their influence on the message. Instead, they make sure the parties understand that interpreting always implies a certain reformulation of the original, a rewriting of the message that reflects certain interests and priorities. According to this view, a mediated exchange will never be the same as a non-mediated one. If an advocate interpreter believes it necessary to add, explain or comment on something, he or she will therefore do so explicitly, without trying to conceal that they are the authors of such clarifications and notes as they deem necessary to improve the communication between the parties.

### 1.6 Subscale 6: social scope of the interpreter's role

Conduit interpreters act in the firm belief that every communicative act pertains exclusively to the parties involved, which implies that they do not see themselves as responsible for its development, results or consequences. Confrontation between the parties is accepted and left for them to solve. Conduit interpreters are first individuals, and only then members of the group, which is typical of individualist societies (Rudvin, 2007: 61-65). According to this view, interpreters should always be distinguishable from the parties, as independent individuals, and they will very clearly make the distinction between the information they are reproducing as part of their job and the opinions they may give as individuals.

Advocate interpreters show a strong tendency to behave as members of the group, on the basis that every communicative act has an impact on society as a whole, which is typical of collectivist societies (Rudvin, 2007: 61-65). Accordingly, they believe they are performing a social duty through their responsibility in the communicative act. They do not wish to be considered independent individuals, but instead team up with the parties and help them to achieve their goals. They consider it legitimate to intervene to achieve interpersonal harmony. Advocate interpreters do not see a clear split between their professional and their personal selves: what they say, even on behalf of the parties, will influence their social reputation.

### 1.7 Subscale 7: interpreter's communicative coordination

According to Wadensjö (1993), interpreters can have a dual function, not only translating (relaying) information but also coordinating communication. In this respect, conduit interpreters would assume only the role of translator, as they consider it the duty of the interlocutors to oversee the coordination of the communication. Thus, conduit interpreters will adapt to the parties' needs if and when the parties require them to do so, but will not take the lead in this respect.

Advocate interpreters, for their part, are both translators and coordinators. They believe it is their role to manage the communication among the parties and distribute speaking turns. They are assertive in this sense, which forces the parties to delegate coordination to interpreters and follow the norms they establish.

### 1.8 Subscale 8: interpreter's notion of fidelity

The conduit interpreter has a lexical view of the idea of fidelity and therefore tends to keep the literal source meaning as much as possible in their target version of every utterance, what Wadensjö defines as "close rendition" (Wadensjö, 1998: 107). These interpreters reject modifying the original message and avoid adding explanations as much as possible.

Fidelity, as the *skopos* theory (Reiß & Vermeer, 1984) understands it, is nonetheless an important function in the eyes of advocate interpreters: faithfulness is achieved to the extent that the parties' goals and contextual needs are fulfilled. Advocate interpreters therefore feel entitled to alter the literal meaning of the original utterance for this purpose, which legitimises using other semantic strategies proposed by Wadensjö (1998: 107-108): expanded renditions, reduced renditions, summarised renditions, two-part or multi-part renditions, non-renditions and zero-renditions.

### 1.9 Subscale 9: interpreter's grammatical identification with speakers

Conduit interpreters tend to use the first grammatical person when reproducing original utterances in the target language, directly assuming the sender's words and thereby blurring the interpreter's individuality. This option is consistent with conduit goals, since it hinders the addition of any extra information, allows for a higher degree of literalism in the target utterance, and obliges the interpreter to clearly signify their authorship in the unlikely event of asking questions or adding explanations, using formulas such as: "Excuse me, as the interpreter, I would like to ask you...".

Advocate interpreters are more likely to use the third person to relay the interlocutors' messages. This has the advantage of allowing the interpreter to always make the distinction between their own statements (in the first person) and those of the parties (in the third person), allowing them to clearly signify who is saying what. Using this method, it is easier and more natural for interpreters to give advice or comment on cultural issues.

## 2 Value and purpose of the continuum

The parameters and their related subscales, as presented, enable the study of actual role performance in different situations, as well as normative and typical roles (Goffman, 1961) of interpreters in a given society or field using flexible, non-prescriptive categories. Acknowledging the existence of many different options and combinations allows for flexibility, understanding that roles can be adapted to the specific circumstances of each communicative act along the different parameters presented, and that interpreters are entitled to modify their role over the course of an interaction to adapt to changing needs.

This model was used to create a self-assessment tool which may render biases and implicit views explicit to help interpreters and users to negotiate their expectations. The tool was preliminarily used (1) in the training of future public service interpreters; and (2) as a resource for gaining insights into public service interpreting user perceptions.

### 2.1 The continuum in dialogue interpreter training

When we first approached the issue of role in public service interpreting, our original intention was to improve our understanding of the subject in order to improve our teaching. During the first academic years that we taught the course *Interpretación II: Técnicas de mediación intercultural* as part of the BA programme in Translation and Interpreting at the Universidad Pontificia Comillas, this continuum was taught as part of a curricular theoretical content lecture, in which the theoretical explanation was followed by examples and question answering. Though the scales helped students to take a stance before interpreting role-play assignments, some notions and dilemmas were too abstract. A content module with a flipped learning methodology (Bergmann & Sams, 2012) was then developed within a module called “Profiles and roles in dialogue interpreting” (for further details, see Aguirre Fernández Bravo & Guindal Pintado, 2018), which precedes interpreting role-play assignments in social services, a field in which ethical dilemmas related to fidelity and impartiality are likely to arise. Students read a chapter (Aguirre Fernández Bravo & Roca Ugorri, 2015) on the subscales at home, prior to the face-to-face class, during which different subscale-related activities are enacted to verify and consolidate students’ comprehension of the key concepts in the mediation continuum. The class begins with a warm-up quiz to quickly go through all nine subscales in group. After this knowledge-activating activity, the trainer guides the group through different exercises in which students watch and analyse videos portraying interpreter-mediated events. Depending on the student number, the group can be further divided into smaller subgroups, either so that each one can work with a different video, or so that they can each focus on one subscale or group thereof while watching the same video. In any case, the lecturers only act as discussion moderators, distributing turns, managing the time, and making the appropriate comments so that students verbalise and reflect on the different mediation options, ask any questions they might have concerning role and possible ethical dilemmas, etc.

We agree with Setton and Dawrant’s view (2016b: 10) that a key pedagogical principle in interpreter training is incremental realism. In the early stages of training, it is better to work with ad hoc materials that present a simplified version of the integral task that the student can perform in a protected environment, with challenging elements added incrementally. Since ours is an introductory course to dialogue interpreting, we have created a small collection of videos covering different areas in dialogue interpreting (mainly public service interpreting situations in the fields of health care and social services, but also business interpreting mediated events, in order to cover all areas of our curriculum). We thoroughly script and record the videos ourselves so that nothing is left to improvisation and the different subscales are visibly represented in each situation through examples that students can identify and analyse. They will watch each video with some previous context about the communicative situation they are about to observe (e.g. With the help of the hospital’s interpreter, a British doctor interviews a Spanish lung cancer patient in order to determine whether the patient is a suitable candidate for a clinical trial of a new experimental painkilling drug) and, more importantly, with previous, concise instructions on what they should be looking for (e.g. At which point of the mediation continuum would you place this interpreter regarding her notion of fidelity? Explain your answer with specific examples of her actions in the video. Would you say this strategy is appropriate for a medical interpreter? Why?).

Although no statistical study has yet been conducted, an increased use of continuum-related concepts has been observed in the self-assessment forms students complete and submit after interpreting in classroom role-play assignments. It therefore seems that the mediation continuum can be helpful to foster their use of professional metalanguage and their introspection skills. A natural next step would be to assess the possibilities and potential of turning this module into a crash course for ad hoc, non-professional public service interpreters, transforming the video collection into a bigger repository of materials.

## 2.2 The continuum as a means to gain insight into users' perceptions

So far, our continuum has been applied to a real interpreter-mediated context in a survey carried out by Domínguez Perez (2018), who conducted a case study on healthcare interpreting for her final Bachelor's dissertation. She collected the perceptions of a sample of Spanish doctors who had worked on a medical project in Turkana, Kenya, on the role and importance of the interpreter in such situations. Under our supervision, and under the guidance of one of the doctors that had participated in the project, the student developed a questionnaire with nine multiple choice questions, each presenting a typical case in the Turkana project between one or more patients, a doctor and an interpreter. Every case matched one of the nine subscales in the mediation continuum, and the four multiple choice options portrayed different mediation positions along the continuum (a 'pure' conduit interpreter, a conduit-mediator, a slightly advocating interpreter and a 'pure' advocate). Doctors were invited to choose the option they thought was more appropriate for each situation. Nineteen doctors agreed to be surveyed. Eight of the nineteen subjects also answered five open-ended questions on their views of interpreters as cultural mediators in order to make the global picture more comprehensive.

Although the scope of this first study is admittedly restricted, and limitations can be identified in this very modest approach in relation to size and representativity of the sample, and the ecological validity of collected data (being based on a survey and not on a real-life interpreter-mediated event), it was interesting as a pilot experience and showed a certain potential in our subscales for interpreter users to frame their expectations. In this case (health care interpreting for an off-site, pro-bono project in a foreign country with a radically different culture), doctors tended to place their *ideal* interpreter mostly on the right side of the continuum, that is, as a mediator with a tendency to advocate. The lowest scoring subscale was the interpreter's view of communication, the only element in which participants in the survey tended to prefer a more monologic, conduit-like interpreter, whereas doctors seemed to support a purely advocate interpreter when questioned about the interpreter's role in Jakobson's classic communication model (participant) or the social scope of the interpreter's role (member of the group).

Policy planners and public institutions willing to provide their workers with training in interculturalism, raise their awareness of the importance of working with professional interpreters, and instruct them on how to create synergies with them, as recommended by Corsellis (2003), could do so by using the mediation continuum and its subscales, among other tools.

## 3 Final remarks: the continuum as a possible performance self-assessment tool for interpreters

Reflecting on our experiences in the application of this mediation continuum, in our training module and as a tool for improving understanding of user perceptions, we wonder whether the subscales could be useful to gain insights into a third and a fourth more complex level: Can the scales be translated into a tool for interpreters to define and assess their professional self-concept? Can public service policy-makers use the scale to become aware of the kind of realistic interpreting that could suit the purposes of their particular services? A tool based on the scales presented in this study could be developed for interpreters and policy-makers to negotiate explicitly, and even help interpreters to make their turn-of-talk options understandable to users and policy makers. Can perceptions and decisions be situated on the spectrum by choosing a position among the numerous possibilities provided by each of the parameters involved, taking into account the specific circumstances of each context of practice in public services? A much-needed theoretical framework shared among decision-makers and practitioners could be used to make decisions that affect fidelity and impartiality, ethical issues that are prone to be compromised in mediation. This type of (self-)reflection could be especially helpful in the case of non-professionals required to act as ad hoc interpreters under certain



circumstances. The discussed learning unit proposal could be used as a basis to design a crash course for non-professionals to reflect on a series of key parameters prior to job assignments.

We wish to stress the fact that this is an ongoing project at an early stage that still needs a more robust empirical basis: we believe that the tool used by Domínguez Pérez (2018) could be used in other domains of interpreting to study user perception, and also role self-assessment. In fact, the first attempt of a case study with this tool had the purpose of comparing novice and expert court interpreters' self-perceptions of what their role should be (Meira Valdés, 2015). Unfortunately, at the time, the difficulties in accessing a considerable number of relevant subjects made it impossible to draw significant conclusions from the limited data collected. New attempts are nevertheless in progress and the subscales are being adapted to survey a sample of interpreters with experience of working in the Afghanistan conflict.

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