The International Journal for Translation & Interpreting Research
trans-int.org

Towards building networks of solidarity: A co-designed training model for non-professional interpreters and translators in regional Australia

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DOI: 10.12807/ti.116202.2024.a05

Abstract: Despite ongoing efforts by different levels of government, barriers still exist for diverse communities in Australia when it comes to accessing culturally and linguistically appropriate social services. These barriers have detrimental effects on the sense of belonging and social inclusion of migrants, as highlighted by recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters. In rural and regional areas, where access to resources and support can already be limited, these issues are particularly pronounced during crisis situations. Non-professional interpreters and translators have played a crucial role in facilitating effective communication in these circumstances, as they are often trusted members of their communities and understand their needs. However, relying on volunteers to provide multilingual communication in times of crisis is neither equitable nor sustainable. In response to this issue, the IMPARO pilot project has been implemented in the regional hub of Shepparton, Victoria, with the aim of providing training and professional development opportunities for non-certified community interpreters and translators. This project utilises principles of co-design and participatory initiatives to foster relationships and associations that promote inclusive practices and solidarity. Using action research and digital platforms, the project ensures equitable access to resources for its participants, who not only strive for professional certification and improved employability but also recognise the value of building intercultural networks of solidarity as a solid foundation to promote sustainable forms of knowledge sharing among diverse communities.

Keywords: non-professional interpreters and translators, training, professional development, regional and rural communities, intercultural networks, action research

1. Introduction

Despite multiple efforts at different government levels, major barriers remain for the diverse communities that make up contemporary Australia in accessing culturally and linguistically appropriate social services, with adverse consequences for the sense of belonging and social inclusion of migrants (Marcus et al., 2022). While government policies routinely acknowledge the multicultural reality of Australian society, the role played by language in

supporting social inclusion and in ensuring equitable access to social services remains largely out of sight. As the COVID-19 pandemic and recent natural disasters have highlighted, the challenges in providing immigrants who are not proficient in the host society's dominant language with equal access to crucial information are particularly acute in rural and regional areas and during emergency situations. Non-professional interpreters and translators (NPITs) have proven to be key in facilitating communication in such circumstances, as they are trusted within their communities (Karidakis et al., 2022) and understand their needs. The term NPIT has gained wider recognition over the last decade and has speedily surpassed other labels that are used to define this practice which is typically carried out by "bi/multilingual speakers who interpret and/or translate in a variety of formal and informal contexts and settings, who have received little or no formal education or training in translation or interpreting and are often not remunerated for their work" (Antonini, 2021, p. 171).

In this paper, we outline a possible model to build capacity within multiethnic and superdiverse communities whereby local community members co-design a training program that will enable them to sit a certification test to become professional translators and interpreters who can support their communities as they navigate the "hazardscape of a multilingual and multicultural society" (Federici and Cadwell, 2018, p. 40). Traditional approaches to the study of multiethnic communities tend to underestimate the actual social, cultural, and demographic complexity of regional towns with a high presence of migrants (Goodson and Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2017). We argue that, by adopting an approach that considers migrant-host relations "from below" (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998), we can develop a more nuanced discussion of the complex cultural and social interactions amongst the inhabitants of rural and regional areas that have experienced an influx of migrants and refugees from very diverse backgrounds. Broadly speaking, such an approach helps us to understand the way new arrivals ground themselves in a new locality, and make it home, while simultaneously changing it in the process. Such an understanding, in turn, facilitates the formation of intercultural networks of solidarity.

The spaces and places within which we live, work, meet, and perform our identities and ideologies contribute significantly to our sense of social responsibility, civic engagement, social inclusion, and psychological well-being, or conversely our sense of isolation and exclusion. Thus, a process that encourages solidarity should facilitate a transcultural understanding of space and place, and how we can explore, experience, understand and transform specific localities. In facilitating such a process, we must recognise the centrality of language, for instance through multilingual and translanguaging processes that value and employ linguistic and cultural differences. This requires the development of models that challenge the divide between the university and the community (Glick Schiller, 2011).

We aspire to extend traditional transactional models of university outreach in which, for example, academics develop and deliver a skills-based training program for an organisation or a community but have little or no further engagement with participants. We favour a bidirectional model of engagement in which university, industry, and community partners collaborate to develop and apply knowledge to address challenges faced by local communities. Collaborative and multidisciplinary approaches enable the individuals and communities that are the object of these studies to become active participants in and subjects of the research. It is our contention that a community-engaged research approach provides an opportunity for greater trust and respect to be built between academic researchers and communities.

This article discusses the importance of inclusive solidarity and the need for more transversal relationships and associations in building a sense of belonging and social cohesion. We propose a methodology based on non-linear co-creation between community members and academic researchers, as well as open-source access to data through digital visualisations. We highlight the use of action research as a productive framework for community participation and empowerment. We then present the IMPARO pilot project, which focuses on NPITs in the regional hub of Shepparton, Australia.

2. Inclusive - transversal - professional solidarity

Our premise is that the term solidarity is a "floating signifier" in the sense proposed by Laclau (1990, p. 28), that is, we understand it to be an expression with fundamentally different and potentially conflicting meanings depending on the discourse using it (García Agustín & Jørgensen, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic and recent natural disasters (floods, bush fires) in Australia have stimulated new waves of civic engagement and new solidarities. In particular, there has been an increase of acts of "transversal solidarity" that are characterised by "inclusive social and spatial practices and [have] the capability of generating new social bonds and expanding the space for participation" (García Agustín & Jørgensen, 2021, p. 859).

Like Schwiertz and Schwenken (2020), we recognise that "solidarity hardly ever arises automatically, but must be produced in performative practices – 'doing solidarity'" (p. 413). Thus,

> we can study the multifaceted ways of 'doing solidarity', of how solidarities create their own infrastructures, and - in the long run - how this changes the meaning of the concept of 'solidarity' itself. At the same time, such a study of specific practices must stay aware of ambivalence, avoiding binary categories and instead reflecting on the inclusion/exclusion relationship in the practices and institutions of solidarity (p. 415).

We are interested in exploring ways of enacting forms of more inclusive solidarity by building transversal relationships and associations. Our hypothesis is that co-designed/participatory initiatives exemplify inclusive practices, enable relations, and build networks of solidarity that can potentially contribute a greater sense of belonging and social cohesion.

Thinking about the extent to which we can identify and create spaces of more horizontal relations that would enable dialogical and egalitarian practices of solidarity led us to a consideration of professional solidarity. In reviewing the literature, we found that professional solidarity as expressed via workplace culture is largely under-investigated. This seems a little surprising, given solidarity's historical links with the workplace. Smith (2015), for instance, argues that the rise of the ideal of solidarity is "intimately bound up with work" from the workers' movements in mid-nineteenth century France to the establishment of the trade union Solidarność in Poland in the 1980s, where solidarity meant uniting to improve working conditions. While the beneficial outcomes of 'acting in solidarity' at work are not guaranteed and may not be evident to particular groups, we would argue that the overlap of work and community can create a strong sense of solidarity. Arguably, the work of translators and interpreters often overlaps with community contexts, and it seems obvious that, as a group, they would espouse the notion of professional solidarity as articulated in the AUSIT Code of Ethics:

> Practitioners have a loyalty to the profession that extends beyond their individual interest. They support and further the interests of the profession and their colleagues and offer each other assistance (AUSIT, 2012. p. 7).

This notion of solidarity is one that underpins our approach in designing a professional development program for and with regionally based NPITs. We believe that this approach holds the potential to not only advance the interests of the profession, but also yield positive outcomes for social inclusion and a stronger sense of citizenship.

3. Methodology

Our methodology is based on two fundamental pillars. First, traditional models of interaction between communities and scholars must be challenged to develop more authentic and productive modes of non-linear co-creation between community members and academic researchers. Second, open-source, engaging, and interactive access to the research data for projects involving communities should be provided through digital visualisations, to the benefit of all stakeholders, including policymakers and community organisations.

The active participation of communities in research and policy development remains limited (Gal, 2017). Action research, a broadly defined methodology that takes different forms, provides a productive framework to amplify community participation. By connecting research, action, and participation, action research is commonly used to improve conditions and practices in, *inter alia*, health and education studies (Koshy, 2010). One of the key strengths of this approach is the ability to empower participants by providing them with "a collective means of addressing current inadequacies or inequalities" (Waterman et al., 2001, p. 13). Additionally, it promotes a new focus on the concept of migrants' urban emplacement, which involves the intricate relationship between the constant changes that affect an urban context, be it metropolitan or regional. This encompasses the complex interplay of transcultural and intersectional networks that develop within these contexts, as well as the migrants' ability to acquire and accumulate social, cultural, and financial capital within the constraints of their specific locality, but also through complex transnational, translocal, and global networks (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2013). In this way, action research offers a valuable framework for understanding and addressing the multifaceted and dynamic nature of migration and its impact on urban communities.

Starting from these theoretical and methodological convictions, we developed the IMPARO pilot project. The name of the project is an acronym that stands for 'Interpreter Mentoring and Professional Advancement Regional Opportunities', but it also references our university's motto "Ancora Imparo", Italian for "I'm still learning", highlighting the continuous learning that is central to the goal of this project. The IMPARO project was articulated in a series of participatory workshops with individuals who serve as non-professional interpreters and/or translators in the regional hub of Shepparton, in Victoria, Australia. The workshops focused on the understanding of the current working situation of NPITs in Greater Shepparton and the co-design of possible solutions meeting their needs and their desire for more accessible translation and interpreting (T&I) training opportunities.

While we were conducting our scoping literature review, we came across an ongoing project that was initiated in 2015 in rural Minnesota (Berberi and Genova, 2022). To address the scarcity of local interpreting professionals, language scholars at the University of Minnesota Morris collaborated with the

Center for Small Towns to establish a series of training workshops for community interpreters and translators. Despite working with a different and more uniform cohort (participants in Morris mainly identified as Hispanic/Latinx), findings from the Morris experience closely mirrored our observations working with Shepparton NPITs. Berberi and Genova's article "Interpreting in Rural Communities" explores the challenges and initiatives in providing language services in underserved rural areas, using the authors' experience in a small Midwestern town as a case study. Despite significant growth in rural immigration, access to interpreting services remains limited, with remote solutions often hindered by inadequate broadband infrastructure. The authors established a series of community interpreter training workshops to address these gaps, emphasising local partnerships and cultural sensitivity. They faced significant challenges, such as limited participant availability to commit to the workshops, which were scaled down from 40 hours to four 2.5-hour sessions; the need to revaluate and adapt the workshop content to better suit the specific needs and contexts of the rural community; technological barriers; and the sustainability of the training impact, with a relatively low retention rate of interpreters who stay in the local area and continue to provide language services.

Drawing on the lessons learnt from previous projects around NPIT training in rural areas, the IMPARO workshops aimed to build connections among various stakeholders involved in the project, including the university, local community organisations, and representatives of the many multicultural communities living in the region and active in different fields through their employment or study. These workshops have served as a foundational step in addressing the existing challenges in the provision of language services in rural areas, but have also highlighted the ongoing need for tailored solutions and community engagement to ensure equitable language access in these regions.

4. The Shepparton context

Shepparton is a city located in the Hume region of the state of Victoria, Australia, and situated approximately 180 km north of the state capital, Melbourne. According to the 2021 Australian census, 68,409 people live in the Greater Shepparton area.

In 2005-2006, Shepparton was selected as the location for the Australian Government Regional Humanitarian Settlement pilot. Ten Congolese refugee families settled in the regional city as part of the program. The pilot was deemed a success (Australian Government, 2007) and Shepparton is now one of only four regional locations in Victoria which are part of the Humanitarian Settlement Program, alongside Mildura, Geelong, and Wodonga. The ongoing success of this program, together with a strong migrant presence since after the Second World War, has resulted in a regional community made up of people from over 50 countries, who speak more than 40 different languages (GSCC, 2019). According to the 2021 census data, Shepparton has one of the most multicultural populations in the State, with 25% of residents born overseas and 17.6% speaking a language other than English at home.

Recognising the central role that its many multicultural communities play in strengthening the social cohesion of the region, in 2019 the Greater Shepparton City Council (GSCC) adopted a Multicultural Strategy with a three-year action plan centred around the principles of valuing cultural diversity, accessing opportunity, and enabling contribution and participation. The Strategy contains an explicit commitment to "[m]aximise participation in interpretation courses to provide more local interpreters" (GSCC, 2019, p. 18),

and to move towards community-led approaches to multicultural policy by "investigat[ing] the opportunity to establish a community representative committee to consult with on multicultural matters" (GSCC, 2019, p.15).

Because of its rich cultural and linguistic environment, and of our well-established relationships with local organisations stemming from our previous experience in providing professional development courses in the region, Shepparton was chosen as the location to launch the pilot phase of the IMPARO project.

5. The pilot project

The IMPARO pilot project was conceived following a survey administered during the second iteration of an Introduction to T&I short course that our institution delivered in Shepparton in early October 2022. The survey elicited responses on the topic of improving access to training and professional development opportunities for non-certified community interpreters and translators. The people who took that survey were practising as volunteer/non-professional interpreters and translators and all thirteen of them indicated that they were interested in gaining professional certification. The survey also identified the pressing need for further training opportunities in regional areas that would lead to this professional certification.[1]

A few weeks after the Introduction to T&I course, the Shepparton region was severely hit by major floods. The floods highlighted once again the communication gap between government agencies and multicultural communities, as well as the insufficiency of the language and cultural assistance delivered to migrant and refugee communities in regional areas during emergencies. Like what had happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was multicultural volunteers who played a critical role in helping non-English speakers, not only with translation and interpreting, but also with cultural mediation and practical support, assisting with evacuation and food relief operations. The urgent need to create a more accessible and sustainable model to train local translators and interpreters became even more evident. Accordingly, we decided to embark on a project that had five interrelated aims: 1) evaluate current realities for non-certified T&I practitioners in the Greater Shepparton area; 2) identify training and professional development needs and shortcomings; 3) identify sustainable opportunities for mentorship and ongoing support; 4) create better synergies between university, industry, and local partners and community members; and 5) plant the seed for future collaborative projects that have the potential for positive social impact.

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[1] Certification is issued in Australia by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) following the successful completion of an exam. NAATI exams test candidates on their interpreting or translating abilities as well as their knowledge of the Code of Ethics and Conduct published by the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) and their intercultural competence. Only people who have completed formal training in T&I, either at a NAATI-endorsed institution in Australia or overseas, are eligible to sit a NAATI exam. See full table of languages and certification types at https://www.naati.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Certification-Testing-Languages_PUBLIC_Feb23.pdf. A "Recognised Practising" credential is granted in languages of new and emerging communities where testing is not available. This credential is awarded to individuals who have satisfied the minimum training requirements and can provide evidence of recent and regular experience as a translator and/or interpreter.

We recruited 31 participants using existing connections with Wise Well Women, a local NGO delivering training and support programs to refugee and migrant women, but only 23 were able to participate in the in-person workshops. The participant cohort was highly diverse from a cultural and linguistic point of view, with 10 different languages represented in the group that attended the workshops in Mooroopna. All participants were of refugee background, hailing from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). However, their life journeys were often complex, and workshop activities such as Group Maps, designed for context mapping, showed participants' connections to multiple locales outside their countries of origin and country of arrival. Participants' life trajectories are a reminder of the intricate tapestries of cultures and languages that people who migrate to Australia bring with them and of the importance of recognising that there is diversity within diversity when engaging with Australian multicultural communities.

Participants were diverse from several other points of view (see Table 1). Birth dates of workshop participants ranged from 1964 to 2004, with a median age of 33 years. They also differed greatly in terms of experience in the T&I sector, ranging from practitioners with over a decade of experience to complete beginners. From an employment/education point of view, IMPARO participants studied or worked in different fields. Reportedly, employment conditions can often be precarious, particularly for new arrivals, and many engage in further training with the goal of attaining more secure forms of employment or positions aligned with their expertise and educational background. Most participants were women (18 vs 5 men), in line with data presenting interpreting and translation as female-dominated professions in Australia (Australian Government, 2021).

Prior to commencing the project activities with the Shepparton participants, we recruited six students enrolled in the Master of Interpreting and Translation Studies at our institution for the role of student mentors. This was a volunteer (unpaid) experience that the students undertook as part of the Work Integrated Learning hours required for their course. The concept of the student mentor role went beyond that of traditional workshop facilitators or information gatherers for a research project. In the spirit of co-designing the project, we collectively outlined the specific responsibilities of this role during a workshop with the students. On the day, we jointly articulated the expectations of the role as follows:

> Student mentors listen attentively and show empathy to community participants, but they also share their own knowledge and experiences (recognising that all experiences are valid) in order to generate new ideas. Their role is active and productive. They support, but they are also ready to be challenged and change their mind.

This title of 'student mentor' ultimately proved inadequate for a role in which students not only mentored others but were also mentees, embodying a model in which universities are not merely providers of training and expertise, but also active learners when collaborating directly with communities.

We had our first direct contact with the Shepparton participants during an online session in February 2023 where we introduced the project and held a Q&A session. Two face-to-face workshops were held in June 2023 over two consecutive days at a local community centre in the suburb of Mooroopna. During these workshops, participants engaged in design-thinking activities to identify specific challenges related to non-certified community interpreters and translators in the Greater Shepparton region and to brainstorm possible

solutions related to creating more accessible training opportunities. The workshop approach emphasised collaboration and co-learning, guided by the British Design Council's Double Diamond design thinking framework (Figure 1) and its iterative process to arrive at a shared problem definition and possible solutions to be tested on the ground.

Table 1: Languages, year of birth, preferred gender, and area of employment/study of the in-person workshop participants

Participant	Languages	Year of birth	Gender	Employment/Study
1. AA	Arabic	1996	M	Education
2. AM	Arabic	1977	F	Education
3. BS	Hazaragi, Dari	1990	F	Health
4. EA	Arabic	1969	F	Community Services
5. EM	Swahili, French, Lingala, Kibembe	1986	M	Labourer
6. GQ	Dari, Persian	1999	F	Education
7. GJ	Hazaragi, Dari	2000	F	Student / Community Services
8. HS	Arabic	1987	M	Education
9. IA	Arabic	2004	F	Student
10. IM	Swahili	1997	F	Student
11. JA	Pashto, Dari	1968	M	Student
12. LJ	Hazaragi, Dari	1998	F	Student
13. LL	Swahili	1990	F	Community Services
14. MJ	Dari, Persian, Hazaragi	2004	M	Student
15. MQ	Hazaragi, Dari, Persian	1993	F	Education
16. NM	Arabic	1973	F	Education
17. SA	Arabic	UD	F	Community Services
18. SG	Hazaragi, Dari, Persian	UD	F	Education
19. SH	Dari, Persian	1964	F	Community Services
20. SK	Dari, Hazaragi	1986	F	Home Duties
21. SL	French, Swahili	1982	F	Hospitality
22. SM	Swahili, Kirundi	1995	F	Education
23. SN	Hazaragi, Dari	UD	F	Community Services

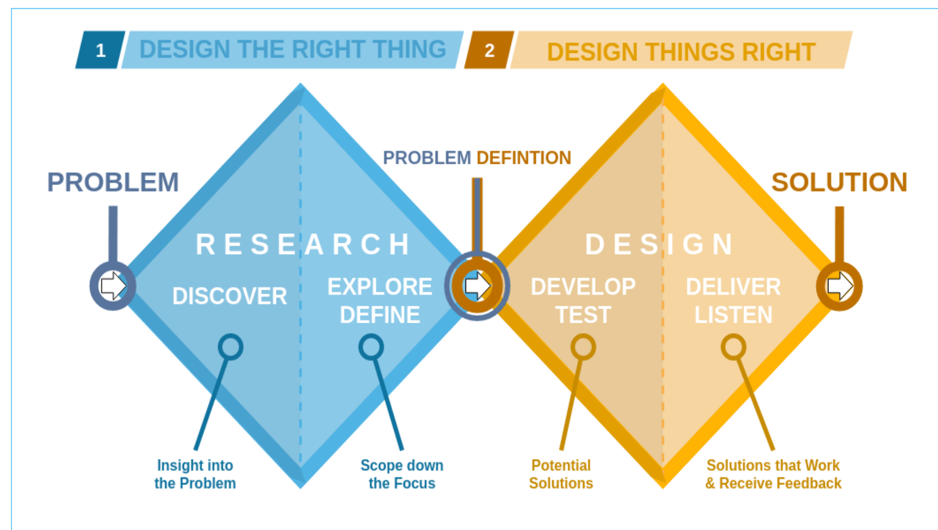

Figure 1: The Double Diamond design thinking framework (Image by Digi-ark, Wikimedia Commons).

The *Discover* phase was covered before the in-person workshops with the scoping survey and a literature review on multicultural demographics in Australian regional areas (e.g., the regional settlement program for humanitarian visa holders), non-professional interpreting and translation practices, including the use of 'citizen translation' in emergencies, i.e., "a translation practice conducted, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes by people who are volunteered, by an individual or a community of individuals who may be trained or untrained linguists" (Federici and Cadwell, 2018, p. 22). Further, we considered the delivery of training in regional and rural areas, and reviewed media stories on the specific situation of volunteer interpreters in the Greater Shepparton region during COVID-19 and the October 2022 floods.

The *Define* phase was the object of the first in-person co-design workshop, where community participants worked with student mentors and the researchers to identify specific challenges to be addressed. The second face-to-face workshop covered the *Develop* phase, with participants brainstorming a range of possible solutions to the previously identified problems.

The *Deliver* phase, which so far included the delivery of an online toolkit containing free resources for interpreters and translators based in regional areas (November 2023), is still ongoing and will be the object of future developments of the IMPARO project.

6. Findings and implications

For many individuals of migrant and refugee background with good English proficiency and knowledge of one or more languages, providing language assistance to other members of their community often starts, not as a conscious career choice, but rather as their everyday experience of being a citizen. They become trusted points of reference for their skills and ability to provide support. Community members stop them at the stores and ask them to clarify the label on a jar. Their neighbours turn to them to help them make sense of their mail. They volunteer to help newcomers navigate the unfamiliar Australian system. Particularly in close-knit communities, like the ones that characterise many small regional towns, strong bonds of support often thrive, creating a unique sense of collective subjectivity and solidarity among residents, particularly

those who share common linguistic and cultural identities, as well as similar experiences of trauma and displacement.

Alongside these informal practices, there exist more formalised practices where NPITs are relied upon to compensate for the lack of professional translators and interpreters outside metropolitan areas. IMPARO participants described how NPITs such as themselves are regularly engaged in their workplaces (schools, hospitals, factories, employment agencies, local NGOs) to facilitate communication with people with low English proficiency, despite their status as non-certified practitioners. In this context, NPITs who participated in our research project largely stood out as a well-established and self-sufficient cohort with strong connections in the local community, who were able to put in place innovative practices and workflows to manage the additional responsibilities that are placed on them to fulfil the communication needs of their communities. An example of a common practice used to find someone with the right language and cultural skills is to widely share a request for assistance through multicultural groups on messaging apps or community organisation networks, without relying on metropolitan-based language service providers.

NPITs are not only compensating for the lack of professional T&Is, but are also often required to step in when professionals are hired. This occurs because of three interlocking considerations that supersede professional certification in importance when it comes to successful communication outcomes for multicultural communities in regional areas: 1) they are based in the local area; 2) they have a deep knowledge of local communities' specific language and cultural requirements; and 3) they are trusted by local communities.

6.1 Location

To be based locally is an asset for NPITs operating in regional areas where, as one participant who works as a nurse in the local hospital shared, "it is hard to find someone who can come on site and do some interpreting" (BS). Professional interpreters are usually accessed via telephone interpreting, which, as research has shown, presents some disadvantages for the quality of the interaction, including ineffective turn-taking, lack of visual cues, poor sound quality due to bad connection/equipment, or background noises (Mikkelson, 2003; Amato, 2018; Wang, 2018; Gutierrez and Mendez, 2019).

As some participants pointed out, telephone interpreting can be particularly inappropriate in the case of emotionally charged interactions and certain types of clients including hard-of-hearing clients, elderly clients, clients with a mental illness, etc. (Wang, 2017). One participant highlighted the difficulties with telephone interpreting in this kind of situation:

> Especially with over-the-phone interpreting, and clients with mental health issues, it just makes the whole environment into an arguing situation and sometimes interpreters hang up the phone and they don't interpret anymore. And then when it's finished, the client turns to your face and says "Can you please tell me what's the translation?" (MQ).

The immediate accessibility of NPITs in settings where T&Is are needed but hard to access, and a preference for in-person interactions, means that they are often the preferred providers of linguistic and cultural support for clients, even though the policies of the organisations they work for might not allow relying on non-professionals for such services.

6.2 Insider knowledge of specific language and cultural requirements

Local NPITs usually hail from the same geographical regions as the communities they serve, they belong to those same communities, and have specific knowledge of dialects, local linguistic varieties, and accents, as well as cultural specificities from those areas. This provides them with an insider position that some clients view more favourably than professional certification when seeking linguistic and cultural assistance.

One of the most prominent issues that emerged during our workshops was the lack of awareness that both individuals and agencies working with interpreters and translators (including language service providers) often display towards the existence of diversity within diversity. Frequently, interpreters are booked without taking into consideration specific dialects or language varieties spoken by the client. This practice, as described by a participant who works in a healthcare setting, might lead to severe communication difficulties:

> If you finally manage to get hold of someone over the phone, it turns out to be someone who is from that country but speaks a totally different dialect. You do understand them but not to a point where it would make sense. You just go along with it. You are shy and out of respect you don't say that you don't understand and hang up. And then, after the session has finished, [the client] says "I didn't understand half of that". I came across it so many times. The interpreter is done and [clients] are like "I didn't understand, you need to explain it to me". But all that critical medical information that was delivered by the medical staff is gone and you cannot undo that (BS).

In cases such as the one described above, when a professional interpreter is booked without checking their specific linguistic or cultural competence and the same interpreter fails to disclose this lack of competence as soon as it becomes apparent during the assignment, NPITs might be left with the responsibility to deal with a communication breakdown that jeopardises the quality of care.

While risks around a lack of competence and accuracy among NPITs certainly exist, the stories collected from our participating NPITs during the workshops indicate that, despite their lack of certification, they had a high level of awareness of the code of ethics. An anecdote shared by one of our participants, HS, an (Iraqi) Arabic interpreter with a medical background, highlights a situation where he was asked to attend an appointment with an Iraqi patient together with a certified interpreter "to help just in case". He recalled having to intervene and point out an unethical behaviour displayed by the interpreter:

> The interpreter was from Egypt. Halfway through the conversation, she didn't understand and didn't pass on the information and said "I know the reason she is like this, she is having too much bread". She talked to the doctor in English and the patient didn't even know what was going on. So I had to stop her and say "I know you're the qualified [one], but you are just here to pass on the message" (HS).

These stories underscore that the quality and effectiveness of interpreting services cannot be solely determined by certification. Indeed, a high level of community knowledge might hold greater importance to ensure successful intercultural communication. It is therefore important to strike the right balance between making sure that the individuals charged with intercultural communication are competent and ethical practitioners, while simultaneously possessing the appropriate knowledge of local communities, dialects, and cultural nuances.

6.3 Trusted by community

Because they belong to the same communities that they service, local NPITs have both insider knowledge and community trust, and are seen by their communities not only as T&Is but also as trusted mediators and allies.

Both during the COVID-19 pandemic and the flood events that hit the Shepparton region in 2022, NPITs provided assistance not only with translation and interpreting, but also with the distribution of translated information materials in the community, food relief operations, and case management support. Their active role as volunteer key workers during crises have made them recognised and trusted in the community, with people often preferring them to certified professionals coming from elsewhere. Speaking about the post-flood days when many Shepparton residents gathered in evacuation centres, a participant recalled that "NAATI interpreters were there, but people were still coming to us" (EA). Trust is built also through demonstrations of solidarity in the face of trauma stemming from the inability to understand and communicate when living in a foreign place, especially during an emergency or a crisis. As one participant shared: "Currently Shepparton CALD communities are retraumatised and they are not receiving the same equal opportunities, rights and access the rest of communities are receiving due to the shortage of interpreters and translators" (MQ).

Official guidelines for working with interpreters in the Australian public sector (e.g. Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, 2016) often stress the confidentiality risks associated with engaging NPITs, discussing for instance the scenario where a community member may feel uncomfortable to have someone they know act as an interpreter, for fear of disclosing private information in front of someone from the same community, especially when the community is small. Research data, on the other hand, is not clear-cut in associating the use of NPITs with confidentiality risks. In fact, studies have shown that issues around confidentiality were equally present when using professional interpreters (Westlake and Jones, 2018; Lucas, 2016; Bramberg and Sandman, 2012; Chand, 2005).

The recognition as a reference figure for the community raises ambivalent feelings in the NPITs. On the one hand, they want to support members of their community, especially new arrivals, and find this role to be rewarding. On the other hand, they feel the burden of this responsibility, which often comes with no official recognition and no boundaries between professional and personal life. As a participant said: "Sometimes I am at the supermarket, and someone stops me to translate a food label. I want to say "no, I am not at work now", but I cannot say that to someone from my community" (MQ).

6.4 Challenges and strengths arising from role multiplicity

The AUSIT Code of Ethics and Conduct, on which every Australian T&I practitioner is tested in order to obtain professional certification, emphasises the importance of establishing and maintaining clear role boundaries. The Code's sixth principle, clarity of role boundaries, states that the "focus of interpreters and translators is on message transfer. Practitioners do not, in the course of their interpreting or translation duties, engage in other tasks such as advocacy, guidance or advice" (AUSIT, 2012: 6). The NAATI certification system also clearly demarcates the different expectations of professional T&I roles: specific tests are in place for different roles (certified translator, certified interpreter, community language aide). However, as seen in previous sections, in the daily life of NPITs, the demarcation between these roles is often blurry and the same individuals are entrusted with complex tasks pertaining not only to translation and interpreting, but also intercultural mediation, community advocacy, and practical support. This role multiplicity is not limited to situations of crisis, such

as the pandemic or the floods, but, rather, it represents the norm described by our participants.

The AUSIT Code of Ethics, under the same principle of clarity of role boundaries, continues by saying that "[e]ven where such other tasks are mandated by particular employment arrangements, practitioners insist that a clear demarcation is agreed on between interpreting and translating and other tasks" (AUSIT, 2012, p. 6). The situation we observed on the ground, however, is one where NPITs are often requested to provide cultural and linguistic assistance by their superiors in their places of work, such as schools and hospitals. In these situations, they are exposed to power imbalances that do not put them in a position where a clear demarcation can be established. The lack of professional certification, in combination with this power imbalance and, in some cases, with a lack of knowledge of the AUSIT code of ethics, hinders NPITs' confidence to question these work arrangements and only take on responsibilities that are formally included in their role descriptions as education aides, nurses and so on.

Another drawback of the lack of role boundaries is that additional translation and interpreting duties in the context of another position increase the workload for individuals acting as T&Is without attracting any additional remuneration. During our workshops, participants shared stories of the additional responsibilities and pressures that they find themselves exposed to as they routinely perform work meant for certified interpreters and translators as part of their jobs.

Additionally, risks exist around the lack of accountability when people are informally assigned translation and interpreting duties without a formal recognition of these roles, warranting the question, whose responsibility is it if something goes wrong?

However, an unclear demarcation of role boundaries equally carries positive connotations for the positioning of NPITs. The interconnected roles that they fulfill makes them valuable assets for their communities. It is indeed from this role multiplicity that NPIT knit trust networks within their communities (Aguilar-Solano, 2015), becoming the primary point of contact when it comes to the community's intercultural communication needs.

6.5 Training: community ownership and networks of solidarity

Despite the strengths in the unique NPIT position discussed so far, the consensus among our participants was encapsulated by the words of one of the participants who claimed that "people would take advantage less if we were certified" (HS). Better access to training and professional certification emerged as first priorities for our project participants and are considered a gateway to fairer working conditions. The main barriers faced by regional NPITs when accessing existing NAATI-endorsed training options were identified as the travelling distance (with all but one NAATI-endorsed courses in Victoria delivered face-to-face in metropolitan areas), inability to relocate to study due to family or work commitments, the cost of training, and the lack of teaching of community languages spoken in Shepparton-based migrant communities in tertiary institutions, resulting in speakers of those languages being offered a less comprehensive, non-language specific training. These barriers that make current training opportunities hard to access or not suitable for regionally based trainees prompted participants to identify the creation of a new NAATI-endorsed course, specifically tailored to regional T&I practitioners, as a solution to their training needs in order to become eligible for a certification test.

Participants understood that a new training course might not be on the immediate horizon, due to the complex and lengthy task of setting up such a course in the highly bureaucratic university environment. Therefore, they

stressed the importance of taking collective ownership of their own learning and finding other options to address the urgent need to access reliable and up-to-date training materials to ensure that the language assistance delivered right now by NPITs practising in the community is safe and ethical, and meets basic quality standards.

Collating existing resources in the form of an online toolkit that local practitioners and local agencies working with T&Is could access freely was suggested as a practical solution to address the immediate need for accessible training materials. The toolkit would contain resources such as useful links and templates, glossaries on different domains of work (legal, health, education, emergency settings…), information about the NAATI certification system and resources to prepare for a NAATI test, as well as resources on ethics, intercultural competence and digital literacy that university students studying T&I are normally given access to. The toolkit would be shared through platforms that participants are already familiar with, such as Google Drive or Microsoft Teams, and would be a 'living' resource that practitioners can not only access but also contribute to by updating existing resources or adding new ones. However, participants repeatedly stressed the need to establish a certain level of gatekeeping around who should be given editing rights, and who should be allowed to access the training course when this becomes available. This would ensure that participants have sufficient language proficiency both in English and their LOTE(s) and a minimum knowledge of T&I practices. The data collected in the post-workshop survey confirmed the vastly different levels of experience, language proficiency, and competence that characterise the cohort of NPITs currently active in the community, further emphasising the need for training to provide everyone with a basic knowledge of safe and ethical T&I practices.

Aside from collating free online resources for easy access, participants stressed the importance of establishing opportunities to connect in person, such as a study group or a mentorship program, with the idea of nurturing existing support networks and forging new ones. These locally managed groups would also complement the formal training course once this is set up and provide the opportunity for trainees to come together to practise in language-specific groups, in the languages and dialects spoken in the community, which is not a feature of most existing university T&I courses, in which only a limited number of languages are offered. With this goal, participants discussed setting up a Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) that would include both in-person learning circles and an online group, leveraging communication platforms currently used by NPITs in the community, such as WhatsApp. As a place of "collective learning" (Wenger-Trayner, 2015), participants envisioned the Community of Practice as community-led and moderated by community-based mentors, a platform and a place for professional debriefing and support, as well as for sharing information and resources.

Solidarity has been recognised as a key aspect of successful collaboration models in educational settings (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018), such as communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). However, Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) highlight that building strong relationships of mutual support needs to be complemented by "solidity". This means anchoring collaborative efforts in research, multidisciplinary expertise, and well-designed tools. Universities, we contend, are uniquely positioned to facilitate the fusion of these two facets because of the depth of knowledge, the expertise, and the pool of resources that they can draw upon. During our workshops, there was a proposal to form a group of community advisors that would collaborate with university staff on the design and delivery of the training course, recognising the value of the strong networks already established by NPITs in their local communities and the

potential that these networks hold for informing wider training and professional practices.

7. Concluding remarks

The role of an interpreter has long been recognised as a complex and multifaceted one. This is especially the case in crisis situations when the challenge for translators and interpreters exceeds linguistic and cultural issues, involving ethical judgments that require a conceptualisation of their role that goes beyond the prescriptive nature of codes of professional conduct for translators and interpreters. The pyramid model first developed by Niska (2000) acknowledges that, while the bulk of an interpreter's job takes place at the "conduit" level, interpreters play different roles at different times, depending on the nature of the interaction. These include roles such as "clarifier" of technical or culture-specific terms, "culture broker" and "advocate", which remain controversial but do happen in real-life situations where the interpreter feels compelled to intervene in a non-neutral way to avoid serious misunderstandings or address power imbalances and ethical issues. Our research suggests that offering linguistic assistance services focused solely on message transfer and characterised by the principle of neutrality, as prescribed by the AUSIT Code of Ethics and Conduct, might not be the most appropriate option in regional communities with a large presence of newly arrived migrants, many of whom present with past experiences of trauma and more complex needs to support their settlement period.

The findings from our IMPARO pilot and those of the project conducted with rural communities in Minnesota (Berberi and Genova, 2022) display several similarities. This suggests that the issues at play are not unique to a single context but rather are typical of language service provision in remote centres with large multicultural populations. Therefore, the insights gained from one experience may hold value for other contexts, and models for improvement could prove scalable, when appropriately adapted.

The significance of our pilot study, and the potential implications of its results, cannot be understated. It is important, however, to acknowledge the constraints imposed by our limited sample size, which may impact the generalisability of our findings. Furthermore, while we endeavoured to conduct a comprehensive analysis, it is worth noting that our study lacked, direct engagement with clients using the services of NPITs thus limiting our ability to fully capture their perspectives and experiences. Therefore, in order to accurately assess the effectiveness and impact of NPITs, future research efforts should consider these factors to build upon and validate our findings on a larger and more diverse scale. It is only through such comprehensive and inclusive research that we can fully comprehend the nuances of this complex and rapidly evolving field.

Despite its limitations, we believe that the IMPARO pilot has affirmed the importance of co-design research methodologies to identify practices and acts of inclusive (and transversal) solidarity. While training remains essential as a pathway to professional certification and improved employment opportunities, its design should be approached with a deep appreciation for existing community practices that work effectively. To achieve this, it is key to take a collaborative approach, where educational providers co-design training models with community advisors who possess invaluable insights into what resonates within their specific contexts. This collaborative process goes beyond the mere act of involving community voices: it is about recognising the rich tapestry of knowledge and experiences that communities bring to the table.

Establishing more equitable partnerships between universities and communities becomes pivotal, bridging the formal, academic knowledge universities offer with the community's knowledge of what works for them. These partnerships are a two-way street, where researchers not only impart knowledge but also gain profound insights from the lived experiences of community members. Such collaborations can transform a university into a dynamic learning hub where students and staff alike benefit from the wisdom and practices of the communities they engage with. The experiences of IMPARO student mentors tell us that exposure to community settings can provide invaluable learning opportunities, enriching the educational journey and fostering a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives. Their feedback, shared during a debriefing session the week after the workshops, showed a deep level of self-reflexivity and genuine commitment to community participants. Student mentors shared that they felt initially "nervous" due to their inexperience in projects working directly with community groups but, while some questions from participants were "intimidating", they found the atmosphere welcoming and were able to establish good connections and meaningful individual conversations. Student mentors reflected on their apprehension about the power dynamics between the university team and community participants, but recognised that the workshops turned out to be a "good mutual exchange of assets" with a commendable balance between the groups.

This collaborative effort by staff and students extends beyond making university resources available to communities as an act of solidarity: it requires a profound recognition of the value that communities bring to the table. Solidarity entails not only support but also recognition by academic institutions that have traditionally assumed they held superior knowledge. Recognising the expertise and contributions of community advisors is a transformative step towards dismantling hierarchical structures and fostering a more inclusive and equal partnership. In this way, collaborating with communities becomes not only a professional responsibility but also an ethical practice founded on the principles of professional solidarity, fostering mutual learning and growth between universities and communities.

With this aim in mind, it is crucial to trust that individuals are adept at working within their own communities and to equip them with the resources needed to refine their practices, rather than imposing change from above. This approach not only respects the autonomy and agency of community practitioners but also acknowledges that their methods are often deeply rooted in the cultural, social, and historical contexts of the community. Empowering NPITs to enhance their practices also empowers the community they serve, creating a stronger support system and promoting social inclusion and a sense of belonging through the reduction of communication barriers. In short, the project undertaken in Shepparton understands the power and ethical dilemmas associated with solidarity "from above" and attempts to either address or acknowledge some of the problematic issues of positionality in solidarity. As Schwiertz and Schwenken (2020) underscore, "doing solidarity" involves a complex nexus of practices, relations, and institutions. Our approach enables research to transition from *talking* about acts of solidarity (and addressing social injustice) to *doing* solidarity by creating a space that allows everyone to participate in the production of knowledge, thus promoting social justice through multilingual and intercultural communication.

It is important to recognise that diversity and difference are central values to be acknowledged and respected, not erased, in the building of intercultural and interdisciplinary networks of solidarity. It is also important to recognise that solidarity can be found in multiple forms: in the interpersonal practices of the

everyday, in activist initiatives, and in professional affiliations. Practicing inclusive solidarity fosters new relations, sociabilities, and collective subjectivities, and it helps us to move away from a deficit model that views linguistic diversity as a problem. Instead, it recognises the value of multilingualism, viewing linguistic and cultural diversity as a creative engine of civic participation and social wellbeing.

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