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# Community Interpreting: Mapping the present for the future

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## 1. Introduction

Community Interpreting (CI), or public service interpreting (PSI) as it is also commonly known, is a service that is invariably rooted in the communities and societies that require and provide it. As such it reflects the practices, norms, standards, needs, demands and policies of these communities and societies. CI or PSI, as the double denomination already suggests, comes in many national and geographical variations and is impacted by societal and political forces at local, regional, national and international levels. However, while the diverse circumstances of CI may help to explain the variety in current practices, they also lead to marked differences in the quality and extent of the services provided, which is a concern for practitioners and researchers alike. A sufficiently flexible and well-researched, reliable and enforceable international CI standard or set of standards has not yet materialized.

Research into CI, like research into some other forms of translation and interpreting such as audiovisual translation and conference interpreting, was undertaken by practitioners before it made its way into the academic world. As Napier aptly asserts, publications on CI increased exponentially in the 1990s: “a few papers on medical interpreting appeared during the 1970s but the majority emerged in the late 1990s fuelled by the organisation of the *Critical Link: Interpreters in the Community Conferences*.” (2011, p.123).

Today much community interpreting research focuses on specific local and global practices, policies and developments. It has become a sound and well-established academic discipline that draws on many of the research methods and paradigms evident in Translation Studies (TS) in general. A significant amount of current CI research takes a mixed-method qualitative and quantitative approach. Much research is interdisciplinary and cross-border, some is smaller scale and addresses more local phenomena; often an evidence-based corpus approach is taken. It is beyond the scope of this short introductory article to provide a comprehensive survey of recent research trends in community interpreting; however, as was the case in the 1990s, there are pertinent conferences which provide valuable insight into the topics that fuel current CI research. Then as now, advances in research appear to be well ahead of progress in CI policies.

As mentioned above, its strong local societal roots and the lack of cross-border standards continue to hamper the development of uniform policies for CI. This situation is particularly worrying in view of the current mass migration to Europe and elsewhere at a time when many governments are slashing their budgets for CI and sparse funding is available for interpreting in conflict zones and war-torn regions. In this context we will therefore mention two non-academic initiatives that merit our attention and take up concerns about the

direction CI practice might be taking: the European Network of Public Service Interpreting and Translation (ENPSIT), a Europe-wide initiative uniting practitioners and academics (see also Rillof & Buysse in this volume) and the International Standard ISO 13611:2014(E), *Interpreting – Guidelines for Community Interpreting*, published in 2014. Before introducing the articles in the present volume we shall also survey the central themes of two important CI conferences to be held in November 2015 and June 2016 respectively: InDialog 2<sup>1</sup> and Critical Link 8<sup>2</sup>. We will discuss both briefly, but first offer our own definition of CI.

We consider community interpreting or public service interpreting to be any form of bi-directional dialogue interpreting, implicating a triadic constellation with a client or clients, one or more end users, and an interpreter. The dialogue may be in a community, legal or public service setting and will involve the transfer of signed, and/or verbal and non-verbal messages in real time. By its very nature it therefore includes interpreting that encompasses a wide range of settings and participants, from hospitals to courtrooms and refugee camps; from tourists on pleasure trips to resettled migrants and refugees from and in conflict zones. Community interpreting ensures that any person who seeks access to a community or public service is able to do so on the same footing as a native speaker of that community. At the same time, it enables civil servants and other service providers to provide equal services to all sectors of the population, allowing them to fulfil their legal obligations.

## **2. The European Network of Public Service Interpreting and Translation (ENPSIT)**

The European Network of Public Service Interpreting and Translation has been set up in an attempt to create order in the chaos and standardize CI/PSI. ENPSIT's focus is on policy in respect of both Public Service Interpreting (the term it uses) and Public Service Translation (ENPSIT, n.d.). One strength of ENPSIT is its multi-stakeholder membership which includes service providers, interpreters and translators, academics and policy makers. The ultimate aim of the organization is to professionalize the field further and to establish international standards of practice and training. ENPSIT's prime focus is Europe and especially EU member states but its membership is broader. It was founded in Belgium in October 2013 and was registered as a non-profit organization in April 2014. ENPSIT believes that the EU has an important part to play in the consolidation, expansion and professionalization of PSI. It maintains that an EU Directive for PSI is urgently needed since Directive 2010/64/EU (see below) covers the right to interpretation and translation only in criminal proceedings in European member states. It is hoped that an EU Directive covering all areas of CI/PSI will carry sufficient weight to set further standardization of the field in motion. The ENPSIT initiative originates from concerns similar to those of the ISO standard: the need for increased standardization and professionalism within CI/PSI. It also highlights the priority of convincing policy-makers, and all who set and implement political agendas, of the urgency of effecting safeguards to ensure high-quality CI/PSI across the board.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.indialog-conference.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.criticallink.org>

### 3. International Standard ISO 13611:2014(E)

ISO 13611:2014(E) *Interpreting – Guidelines for Community Interpreting* aims to provide criteria and recommendations for good practice in community interpreting. It offers an overview of the various components of CI practice and its settings, including a discussion of the rights and duties of those who provide and use the service: Interpreting Services Providers (ISPs), e.g. government agencies; interpreters; clients, e.g. doctors; and users, e.g. migrants. However, the standard consists mostly of definitions of CI terms; CI variants and contexts; the tasks and roles of the different professionals; as well as the individual and shared responsibilities of all persons involved in interpreted interaction.

The clarifications provided in the document are beneficial given the extreme diversity in CI approaches and contexts. The definitions may be useful for newcomers to the field, including policy-makers facing societies that are increasingly multilingual and multicultural. However, the ISO standard remains superficial. It does not give concrete examples of specific practices, describe typical pitfalls or suggest how to ensure professional quality. Rather, it offers a survey of practices and contexts without setting standards. Some of its definitions are incomplete, insofar as specific forms of interpreting and the competencies they require are sometimes inaccurate or insufficiently delineated.

The ISO standard does highlight most if not all the issues that remain critical for practice and research today. Below we list those CI issues that appear to be the most urgent and demanding of attention – albeit to differing degrees – in the various parts of the world. There is a need for

- professionally qualified interpreters and a system for ISPs to verify the qualifications of those they employ;
- professional training in specific CI competences by qualified institutions or the relevant authorities, and awareness of all the competences required;
- a body to overview competences and qualifications and to update them on a regular basis;
- interpreters to adhere to the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice relevant to their sector and geographical area;
- all participants in interpreted interactions to be aware of how interpreted interaction functions, to understand the scope of their responsibilities and the asymmetrical (power) relations between them, including the need for interpreters to be conscious of their own limits;
- the structured organization and use of CI service provision at local and national levels.

The ISO standard unfortunately does not address these issues sufficiently clearly in terms of the standards to be achieved and how to enforce them. It also fails to take a clear stance either in a) defining what should or should not be considered CI, or b) describing the specific ways in which some of its variants differ or should be considered different practices (e.g. legal interpreting), thus requiring a different set of skills, different interpreting modes (i.e. consecutive versus simultaneous interpreting), different degrees of cultural mediation, and different types of training, etc. Most importantly, however, the ISO standard does not adequately tackle the need for standardization which the current diversity in CI requires. While it is to be welcomed that CI/PSI has become the subject of an international ISO standard, which raises awareness of its prevalence, it remains regrettable that ISO standards are not enforceable. Even a more elaborate version of the ISO standard – one that met the current need for

clear-cut norms in CI policies, practice and training – would remain nothing more than a guideline to be followed or ignored. This brings us back to the subject of research into CI/PSI, the topics that constitute the current focus of academics' attention, and how they fit into the picture painted of CI/PSI so far.

#### 4. Two CI conferences: similar and different?

What are the issues on which two contemporary CI conferences focus their attention? Do they invite research on similar topics? And how do these relate to the above-mentioned needs?

Two similarities shared by the InDialog 2015 and Critical Link 2016 conferences and their calls for papers are apparent even at first glance. Firstly, and unlike more general Translation Studies conferences such as the well-established conference of the European Society of Translation Studies (EST)<sup>3</sup> which targets academics, both InDialog and Critical Link explicitly aim at a much wider public: The InDialog 2 conference

will once again be dedicated to community interpreting in its many guises, and targets government representatives, policy makers, service providers, users and commissioners of signed and spoken interpreting services, researchers, trainers, interpreters, language and cultural mediators, and students (Indialog, 2015).

For its part, Critical Link 8 reaches out to

community and public sector representatives, employers, developers of tools and technologies, policy makers, practitioners, professional bodies, researchers, service users, trainers and educators, TICS (translation, interpreting & communication support) service providers, and other interested parties (Critical Link International, 2015).

Thus, both conferences target the same stakeholders as the ISO standard and ENPSIT, and there is no doubt that the concerted effort of all these stakeholders is required to move matters forward.

Secondly, both CI conferences draw special attention to the use of technology and the role it is expected to play in both interpreter training and practice. A particular focus of the InDialog 2 conference is “*Community Interpreting in Dialogue with Technology*” since the

varying national contexts and professional needs as well as the sheer mass of languages requiring interpretation highlight the ongoing need for new and sustainable solutions and policies to support access to multilingual services within and across nations. The InDialog 2 conference will contribute to identifying and promoting steps to implement effective solutions. Technology is becoming more and more evident in community interpreting today, it is time to examine its impact, opportunities and limitations in research, training and practice in the field (Indialog, 2015).

Similarly, Critical Link 8 wishes to “explore future-proofing community/public service interpreting and translating” (Critical Link International, 2015), aiming at the interpreter of tomorrow and the role technology may play in allowing work “across professional, geographic, user-group and language communities” (ibid.).

However, both conferences are careful not to limit their focus to technology or its role and potential impact on the field. A closer look at the respective programmes reveals more similarities between the two events even though the approach of each also varies to some extent. The themes suggested

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<sup>3</sup><http://bcom.au.dk/research/conferencesandlectures/est-congress-2016>

for papers and panels, and indeed the themes taken up in the programme of InDialog 2, which is online as we write, hark back to the CI issues discussed in the ISO standard and listed for action by ENPSIT. Furthermore, the title of the present volume, *Community Interpreting: Mapping the Present for the Future* – announced in the initial call for papers following the first InDialog conference held in Berlin in 2013 – is reflected in the concerns of Critical Link 8, which aims to “explore future-proofing community/public service interpreting and translation”.

Just where the future will take CI is indeed a crucial question. InDialog 1 provided testimony to the progress made in interpreting research and training, but the conference also showed that other forces were working against the expansion and professionalization of CI practice. It seemed important therefore to map the present trends, both positive and negative, in order to move beyond them in the future.

Paying more attention to the role that technology can play, an avenue for research considered to be of interest by both InDialog 2 and Critical Link 8, is one possible solution. However, technology cannot be a cure for all ills. Other solutions must be developed to accommodate diversity in CI practice and to deal with its dependence on policy makers’ decisions and the perceived limitations of national and regional budgets. Creating uniformity in CI across the board may therefore be neither possible nor desirable. Like other forms of translation it will always have to be “localized” to meet local needs. The question then arises of how global standardization and professionalism can be achieved notwithstanding the need for diversity. The answer is reflected in the two conferences’ selected topics.

The Critical Link 8 call for papers invites contributions on policy, practice and pedagogy, specifying that policy may include “frameworks or procedures both within professions or communities of practice or user groups and between these groups”, as well as “ethical issues, quality control, working conditions, or service provision and procurement” (Critical Link International, 2015). Practice is considered to encompass “the landscape of the community/public service interpreting and translation world, the evolving nature of the needs and solutions” and can include “the links between the various players, but also between the activities and roles within the process [and] focus on specific fields.” Pedagogy refers to “education and training provision, practice and resources”, especially in collaboration with “service users and other professional communities in training/education and resource-building” (ibid.). The conference attempts to accommodate the diversity and rapidly changing trends that characterize CI while including topics relating to its professional future and interpreters’ working conditions.

Very similarly, InDialog 2 also invited papers dealing with various aspects of “policy”, “practice” and “pedagogy”. According to the conference call for proposals:

The varying national contexts and professional needs, as well as the sheer mass of languages requiring interpretation, highlight the ongoing need for new and sustainable solutions and policies to support access to multilingual services within and across nations (Indialog, 2015).<sup>4</sup>

More specifically, it invited presentations on the challenges posed by growing multilingualism and geographical distances, community interpreting training and evaluation in different contexts, the possibilities and limitations of distance learning, virtual worlds, avatars...., but also best practices and quality

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<sup>4</sup> The original call remains viewable at [http://www.indialog-conference.com/pdf/InDialog\\_2015\\_cfp.pdf](http://www.indialog-conference.com/pdf/InDialog_2015_cfp.pdf) (accessed 28/10/2015). The current conference programme, introductory statement and press section also incorporate large parts of the original call, e.g. <http://www.indialog-conference.com/press.php>.

monitoring in practice, training and research, as well as CI logistics and management, among other things. In addition, the InDialog 2 call for papers invited presentations on community interpreting research methodology, data collection and analysis, aiming to update and communicate research methods in support of policy and practice. At the time of writing, the final In Dialog 2 programme shows that all the above topics and more will be covered at the conference. This diversity in research reflects the diversity that characterizes practice and shows that it aims to tackle all the challenges that practice holds.

## 5. Mapping the present for the future

The first step in this volume is also to “map the present”, and given the ubiquitous diversity in practice, it will be a colourful map, but also one that indicates niches meriting further exploration “for the future”. The 13 papers in this special issue of *Translation and Interpreting* – some based on presentations delivered at InDialog 1, others submitted solely on the basis of the respective call for papers – represent just under half the manuscripts that were reviewed. They constitute a solid body of work and throw light on many of the issues raised to date. Our thanks go at this point to all the authors for their valuable contributions and to the many peer reviewers who generously gave their time and valuable input.

The articles have been grouped into three sections, which deal with the following topics in a CI context:

- The interface between written and oral translation/interpreting;
- Improving training and assessment from different methodological angles and in different settings;
- Access to CI services.

Three of the articles in this volume explore the critical terrain between oral and written translation. While sight translation is a skill commonly expected of community interpreters in certain countries and settings, in other countries and contexts it contravenes the accepted code of ethics for public service interpreters. Anne Birgitta Nilsen and May-Britt Monsrud report in their article on preliminary findings regarding community interpreters’ sight translation skills in Norway. The public service interpreters tested in their survey come from a wide range of cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds – factors which the authors suggest substantially influence the community interpreters’ ability to perform sight translation at an adequate level of competency in the Norwegian setting.

In his article Simo K. Määttä looks at the inherent scope for injustice and the imbalance of power between public administrators and migrants and/or refugees in interpreter-mediated discourse, especially when the discourse of interpreted interviews is rendered as transcripts and written reports. Against the backdrop of community interpreting practice in urban Finland he reflects on the substantial impact of discourse reporting on the subsequent chain of critical decisions on migrants’ and refugees’ lives, suggesting that neutral, uniform language as a guarantee of equal treatment for all is an illusion in our multilingual societies.

Ulf Norberg, Ursula Stachl-Peier and Liisa Tiittula report on a niche intralingual speech-to-text interpreting profile to be found in Sweden, Austria and Finland. They describe the history, training and self-perception of keyboard interpreters who transpose the spoken word to written text for late-deafened and hearing-impaired persons in the above countries.

Turning to training, Ineke Crezee focuses on the benefits of interdisciplinary interpreter training using realia and semi-authentic settings to

train community interpreters for the health sector, while Gertrud Hofer, Marcel Egger, Marina Sleptsova and Wolf Langewitz analyse a videotaped physician-patient diabetes consultation mediated by a medical interpreter with many years' experience. Their data indicates that although interpreters' cognitive-linguistic competence can partially compensate for their lack of domain-specific understanding, they need specialized training in the analysis of linguistic discourse as well as domain-specific knowledge and terminology.

In their article, Michaela Albl-Mikasa, Elisabeth Glatz, Gertrud Hofer and Marina Sleptsova turn their attention to health interpreters' rendering of phatic tokens and hedges. Although essential elements of communication, they find on the basis of the videotaped interpreted consultations in the study that these expressions are rarely or inconsistently rendered by the interpreters. They maintain that while medical interpreters may have plausible reasons for not rendering these expressions, they still need to be made aware of the significance of such pragmatic aspects of communication in training courses and/or pre-encounter briefings.

Carmen Valero Garcés presents research findings on the emotional and psychological impact affecting the wellbeing of community interpreters, and underscores the importance of addressing work-related trauma and stress in interpreter training and practice. Heidi Salaets and Katalin Balogh trace the history and development of objective criteria and transparent, reliable assessment procedures for examiners and examinees in legal interpreting training at the Antwerp Campus of Leuven University.

The volume then moves on to the topic of CI service provision for different target groups and in different contexts. In her article on interpreted communication with children in public service settings, Anne Birgitta Nilsen draws attention to the need both for interpreters and for specialized training in interpreting for ethnic-minority children. She further calls for a multilingual perspective when deciding whether an interpreter is required. The author highlights the potential need for interpreting even when ethnic-minority children may master the majority language of a region in specific contexts but may be used to code-switching or opt to speak their second language in other situations.

Maria Aguilar Solano turns her attention to the processes of institutionalization and professionalization of volunteer interpreting in two hospitals on the Costa del Sol in Spain. She documents the establishment of an NGO service for migrant patients and describes a community interpreter profile and self-perception that goes well beyond the generally accepted.

Britt Roels, Marie Seghers, Bert De Bisschop, Piet Van Avermaet, Mieke Van Herreweghe and Stef Slembrouck report on the findings of a qualitative survey of on-site processes of institutional decision-making on the use of community interpreting in the domains of health, education, public administration and employment assistance in Flanders. They call for a self-reflective approach among end users in institutions in order to assure equity of access to public services in the super-diverse, multilingual society that constitutes Flanders today.

Esther de Boe provides a detailed history of community interpreting and its professionalization in the Netherlands, dissecting the status quo and illustrating the impact of governmental policy on the availability and quality of interpreting services. Despite various indicators of the professionalization of public service interpreters in the Netherlands such as training and certification, a code of ethics, set fees and an established system of further training, their effectiveness is limited because they apply only to specific domains (legal, immigration and police affairs) and not to other sectors such as health and education.

To conclude, Pascal Rillof and Lieven Buysse address the disparate availability of public service interpreting in super-diverse societies within



Europe and elsewhere and describe how the European Network for Public Service Interpreting and Translation (ENPSIT) has been founded with the objective among other things of deploying strategies to impact on European and national policy-making, community interpreter training and quality assurance of public service interpreting.

## 6. Conclusion

The social sciences and humanities aim to analyse, reveal and understand how societies function and how the individuals and social groups that constitute them interact. Their more applied research strands also attempt to formulate solutions and ways to tackle such societal issues. Both trends are apparent in all the articles in this volume, and many of the concerns they voice are reflected in the ISO standard, the aims of ENPSIT and the topics envisaged by two CI conferences to be held in 2015 and 2016. However, the complexity and extent of many of the communication challenges confronting today's world hamper our attempt to map the present while undertaking to improve the future. We indicated above that creating uniformity in CI is in all likelihood neither possible nor desirable, and that like other forms of translation, CI will always have to be "localized" if it is to meet local needs. While this has been consistently confirmed by the articles in this volume, their authors also demonstrate the indisputable need for quality in diversity rather than diversity in quality. Achieving this will continue to be a prime concern for researchers and practitioners alike.

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