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Neutrality in public service interpreting: Rethinking the role of public service interpreters

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Most of the interpreting in the world today is done by public service interpreters. However, there has been a great deal of confusion regarding public service interpreting (PSI), specifically the role of the interpreter and neutrality in PSI. While codes of ethics assert that public service interpreters must act neutrally and impartially, users of PSI tend to view the interpreter as their advocate, making it difficult for the interpreter to maintain neutrality. In fact, as previous studies have shown, maintaining neutrality is one of the biggest challenges public service interpreters face. This article provides a review of the existing literature on the role of public service interpreters, ranging from early studies (e.g., Roberts, 1997; Wadensjö, 1998; Pöchhacker, 2000) via more recent work (e.g., Hale, 2008; Kalina, 2015; Valero Garcés, 2015) to the latest studies on the issue (e.g., Balogh & Salaets, 2019; Şener & Kincal, 2019; Runcieman, 2020). Using practical examples, the article analyses some of the existing codes of ethics and professional guidelines, which, as several authors suggest, are insufficient and should be reassessed. Throughout the paper, differences in different PSI settings (e.g., healthcare centres, schools, social services offices) are addressed.

1 Introduction

It was not until the 1990s that interpreting research moved beyond concentrating on cognitive processing skills to placing a greater emphasis on addressing the social context of interpreting and the dynamics of interpersonal interaction.

The growing interest in public service interpreting (PSI) led to the *First International Conference on Interpreting in Legal, Health, and Social Service Settings* held in 1995 in Canada, which evolved into a series of conferences. Since then, many studies examining, at least in part, neutrality in PSI have been published, some of them will be discussed further in this article. The rise of interest in PSI among researchers is not surprising since, as Bill Moody (2011: 38) points out, public service interpreters do most of the interpreting in the world today.

PSI usually takes place in an asymmetrical setting between three participants: an expert member of a national majority (e.g., official, health professional, teacher), a member of a national minority, and an interpreter. The participants tend to be in a different position, and the interpreter, who is the only person who speaks all languages used in the interaction, ends up taking a certain responsibility for the course of the interaction. Additionally, both communication parties, that is the expert representing the powerful side and the member of a national minority, expect the public service interpreter to be their advocate. These expectations stem from the lack of knowledge of the interpreting profession, let alone the existence of codes of ethics for public service interpreters. The client especially tends to perceive the interpreter, who may be the only member of the society whom the client understands, as an advocate, friend, or an ally. In such a situation, it may be difficult for the interpreter to maintain neutrality.

In fact, maintaining neutrality can be the greatest challenge that public service interpreters face (Valero Garcés, 2015: 91), not only because of users' expectations, but also because of the nature of interpreting in public service settings. These settings may be emotionally exhausting and stressful for clients as well as for interpreters, who may find it difficult to separate themselves from the grief of those they interpret for: «The hardest thing is not being able to help them in their lives. People are hungry and I have a computer, an apartment...» (Valero Garcés, 2015: 93).

2 The terminology issue

Scholars of interpreting (Hale, 2008; Moody, 2011; Kalina 2015) regard as problematic the different levels of development of the profession across the world, as such a situation, among other things, leads to different users' expectations that vary from one country to another. While in some countries (such as Australia, Canada, Norway, and Sweden) public service interpreters are

being awarded a special accreditation or certification, in other countries there is a lack of regulation and uniform professional accreditation, and not all public service interpreters are sufficiently trained.¹ As a result, in these places PSI continues to be considered as unprofessional or ad hoc in nature, which is closely linked to poor remuneration and academic prestige of the profession (Runcieman, 2020: 1).

Another issue arising from the different levels of development of the PSI profession is the inconsistency of terminology. There is a great deal of confusion between the terms used to discuss the name of the profession.² Besides the term *Public Service Interpreting*, other terms including *Community Interpreting*, *Dialogue Interpreting* and *Liaison Interpreting* are often used.³ In Canada, interpreters working in public service settings are also referred to as *Cultural Interpreters* (Garber, 2000: 12).⁴

However, the terminology is just the beginning as there is no consensus on where PSI takes place exactly, if it is in a legal setting, or not. Again, the reason for this inconsistency is the different level of development of the interpreting profession, particularly the difference in the development of PSI and legal interpreting. While in some countries a special accreditation or certification is being awarded to both public service interpreters and legal interpreters, in some countries they are only being awarded to the latter.⁵ Given that this is the case in the Czech Republic, the present article approaches public service interpreting

1 This has been the case in the Czech Republic, the author's country of origin, which is therefore the starting point of the discussion.

2 Variances in terminology also apply to legal interpreting; the terms of *Legal Interpreter*, *Court Interpreter*, and *Sworn Interpreter* are all used to describe professionals interpreting in legal settings.

3 However, none of these adjectives add much to the general public's understanding of what the interpreter does (Garber, 2000: 12). Moreover, as Nathan Garber argues, some of them are not only confusing, they may be degrading the importance of the profession: «But for many, [...] the label 'community interpreter' identifies someone who is less than a qualified interpreter» (2000: 11).

4 That being said, all of these terms have one objective in common, to allow everyone to access basic services and communicate with service providers (Runcieman, 2020: 4).

5 In the Czech Republic candidates for certification in legal interpreting must fulfil many requirements that include, among other things, a university degree, a certificate of a supplementary legal course, and at least five years of experience in the translation/interpreting sector. After having acquired the certification, court interpreters must act in accordance with Act No 354/2019 Coll., on Court Interpreters and Translators. Also, there is the Chamber of Court Appointed Interpreters and Translators of the Czech Republic (KST ČR), an organisation representing court interpreters, which has published its own code of ethics. The code is binding for those court appointed interpreters and translators who are members of the Chamber.

(interpreting in hospitals, schools, social services, benefits offices, etc.) and legal interpreting (interpreting in court, police stations, etc.) separately.

Finally, for the purpose of the present article I find it important to address the inconsistency in the usage of the terms *neutrality* and *impartiality*. While dictionaries (Merriam-Webster, Macmillan, Collins) consider *neutrality* and *impartiality* as nearly synonymous, neither the literature on interpreting nor the codes of ethics use these terms identically. In interpreting, *neutrality* is regarded as more complex since it covers not only whether the interpreter is impartial or identifies more as an advocate for one of the participants, but also the extent to which the interpreter actively interferes in the communication process.

Though some authors use both terms without distinction, others such as Pekka Snellman (2016: 266) clearly distinguish between them. Snellman, who has carried out a number of studies on military interpreting, believes that in a civilian context, *impartiality* – that is the ability to remain *non-loyal* to any client – is a more fitting term for neutrality.⁶ Conversely, some authors find the notion of *loyalty* to be closely linked to the interpreting profession. Katalin Balogh and Heidi Salaets (2015: 206) speak about the *double loyalty* of the interpreter, who, as a person in the middle, is situated between two communicating parties, between two loyalties.

3 Neutrality and codes of ethics

On the following pages, some of the recommendations and requirements on neutrality in PSI will be provided. Cecilia Wadensjö (2004: 119) summarises the most common principles to which the public service interpreter shall adhere to prior, during, and after the assignment as follows: the interpreter should not accept the assignment if there is any real or apparent conflict of interest,⁷ for example, close relationship with one of the parties⁸; during the assignment, the interpreter shall adopt a neutral and detached position and refrain from bias towards any communication party; and, finally, after the assignment, the interpreter must observe strict confidentiality and cannot provide any information found during the assignment to outside parties.

6 It is important for military interpreters to be trusted by their fellow servicemen; therefore, in a military context, the term *impartiality* is inadequate as, within the sphere of influence of a military culture, trust is founded upon *loyalty*, or *non-neutrality* (Snellman, 2016: 266).

7 Where conflict of interest is found only during the assignment, not prior to it, the interpreter shall inform all other parties thereof.

8 This applies especially to interpreting in a legal setting (Wadensjö, 1998: 58).

As for the requirement of adopting a neutral stance, the code of ethics for public service interpreters published by META, o.p.s.,⁹ the Association for Opportunities of Young Migrants, based in the Czech Republic, establishes that:

The public service interpreter is an impartial participant in the communication process, which is why he/she does not work for close relatives, express their own political opinions or religious beliefs, show personal likes or dislikes for the client nor for the client's communication partner, give their own opinion on the issue, or provide any advice on how to solve the problem at hand.¹⁰

Apart from the principle of impartiality, the code analyses other aspects, such as confidentiality, which the interpreter must maintain in all circumstances, unless the confidentiality should be contrary to general binding legislation. Such a situation is illustrated in *Ethics and Standards for The Community Interpreter®: An International Training Tool*, a publication aimed at educating and training public service interpreters:

When interpreting for a young man in detention who was mistreated by a police officer, Zere [the interpreter] did not show his anger or allow any personal feelings to influence his interpreting. (He did consider however reporting the incident once the interpreted session was over.) (García-Beyaert, Bancroft, Allen, Carriero-Contreras, & Socarrás-Estrada, 2015: 16)

The purpose of the above example was to illustrate that even though interpreters do not agree with what is being said by the speaker, they should let their tone of voice, body language, and behaviour reflect the feelings of the speaker, not of themselves. Nevertheless, the example also illustrates the circumstances under which the interpreter can disregard the principle of confidentiality.¹¹

9 META is a non-governmental, non-profit association aimed at supporting the integration of foreigners in the Czech Republic. Its code of ethics for public service interpreters has been adopted by the Czech Union of Interpreters and Translators (JTP). However, the code is in no way binding as there is no Czech organisation exclusively representing public service interpreters.

10 All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.

11 For the context of healthcare interpreting, the professional guidelines of the California Healthcare Interpreters Association (CHIA) describe another circumstance under which the interpreter may find it important to disregard the principle of confidentiality. In some cases, patients may share with the interpreter (without the presence of a healthcare

Some codes of ethics also outline specific reasons for which the interpreter may consider declining the assignment. For example, the code of ethics for healthcare interpreters published by The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC), based in the United States, mentions that:

If they [interpreters] are unable to enact their role in accordance with this ethical principle [the principle of fidelity], then interpreters should make this known to the parties and withdraw from the assignment. (The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care [NCIHC], 2004: 13)

Where the communication situation contradicts the interpreter's values, it can be difficult for the interpreter to remain impartial, as demonstrated by the following statement:

Two times I was on the verge of rejecting the interpreting assignment. One time because it had to do with abortion and I am against abortion due to moral and religious norms. The second time it was about a marriage of convenience. During both interpretations I felt very uncomfortable and I don't plan on accepting these kinds of interpreting assignments in the future. (Svakova, 2011; as cited in Valero Garcés, 2015: 95)

Although best practice in PSI is based on a few general rules applicable to virtually all PSI settings, as discussed below, the choice of the interpreter's behaviour is mainly determined by the setting in which the communication takes place (Kalina, 2015: 81). Therefore, some scholars of interpreting (e.g., Kalina, 2015) and PSI professionals call for codes of ethics to be adapted to specific settings as is the case of ethical guidelines for interpreters working in the healthcare and legal setting. Interpreters who work in the educational setting, on the other hand, must borrow the ethics resources developed for healthcare or legal interpreters (Abarca & Allen, 2019).

provider) some health-related information. When patients do not want such information to be shared with the healthcare provider, interpreters, who are unable to estimate whether such information could be critical for the patient's health, must decide whether to remain silent or disregard the principle of confidentiality. Both these decisions imply certain consequences. If the interpreter remains silent, there could be an impact on the patient's health and well-being. However, if the interpreter decides to reveal the information, the level of trust between the interpreter and the patient could be affected.

4 The role of public service interpreters

The issue of neutrality in PSI is closely linked to the role of the interpreter, in other words, to what the interpreter is expected to do in addition to the source-to-target transfer. As stated in the introduction, in some countries there is a lack of regulation for public service interpreters, which ties in with the fact that not all public service interpreters are sufficiently trained. As Sylvia Kalina (2015: 79) suggests, while trained interpreters generally share the understanding that they should interpret as accurately and impartially as is humanly possible, untrained interpreters are not consistent about their role and may often regard themselves as cultural mediators who assist and help their relatives, friends, or compatriots. However, as Roda P. Roberts claims: «[...] it is, in fact, difficult to be a helpmate to and even an advocate of those not speaking the language of the country and still to retain the objectivity and impartiality required to interpret well» (1997: 21).

If we displayed the roles that have been described in connection with interpreting on a spectrum, at one extreme there would be an interpreter interpreting literally word-for-word. This idea of an interpreter who merely acts as an invisible language conduit has been rejected by scholars (Wadensjö, 1998, 2004; Angelleli, 2004; Pöllabauer, 2004). As Wadensjö (2004: 106) notes, public service interpreters are almost always performing two simultaneous tasks at once: apart from procuring the source-to-target transfer, they coordinate other participants' discussion. The reason for this is that the interpreter seeks to promote first and foremost mutual understanding between the communication parties; to put it another way, the interpreter cannot perform his/her work without considering all communication parties' communicative goals. Therefore, the question is not *if*, but *how* interpreters affect the development or even the outcome of the communication, however misunderstood this concept still might be by many.

On the other side of the spectrum there would be an advocate for either the powerless participant (the client) or the powerful participant (the service provider).¹² In the past, scholars of interpreting (Laster & Taylor, 1994; Barsky, 1996) argued for interpreters to adopt the role of the advocate for the

12 These are two of the five roles as adopted by court interpreters and described by Sandra Hale (2008: 102). The model, which is fully applicable to PSI as well, also includes the role of the interpreter who becomes the only powerful participant, or the *gatekeeper*, the role of the interpreter who ensures the effectiveness of the communication, or the *filter*, and the faithful renderer of the original utterances. For the context of court interpreting, Hale considers the role of the faithful renderer to be the only adequate role.

powerless participant, who is, as opposed to the powerful participant who speaks the majority language, at a disadvantage. Over the years, this role has been abandoned. Today, the only public service setting for which researchers accept, without too many reservations, this role, is the healthcare setting, where all participants' priority is the patient's well-being. Considering this fact, I would like to look briefly at both positive and negative consequences of the role of the advocate for the powerless participant. Referring to the views of Hale (2008: 101), it is precisely the consequences of each role that the interpreter needs to consider before adopting a certain role and that should therefore be, unlike personal opinions and preferences, in the centre of future research on public service interpreting.

The role of the advocate for the client can be seen as controversial because there is a risk that the interpreter, in seeking to help the client, unknowingly harms the client's case. This is because the interpreter does not interpret the client's utterances accurately, but in such a way as to make them sound more coherent, more logical, more credible, and, in some cases, less aggressive. To that end, the interpreter may omit some of the utterances that he/she finds irrelevant (Hale, 2008: 103); in other words, rather than interpret the client's utterances accurately, the interpreter speaks on the client's behalf. However, if the interpreter, who probably lacks expertise in the medical, social work, or another field, decides to omit some of the client's utterances, he/she may very well omit an utterance that the service provider would find relevant (for the diagnosis, granting of asylum, etc.). What's more, if the interpreter sides with one of the participants, the other participant may find him/her less trustworthy.

Another problem described by Hale (2008: 106) in connection with the role of the advocate for the powerless participant is that by adopting this role, the interpreter assumes that the client is right, truthful, and discriminated against by the powerful institution. More specifically, if the interpreter in an asylum hearing adopts this role, he/she assumes that all asylum seekers are honest – this assumption is not his/her's to make. Moreover, as stated by Miguel Ángel González Reyes, the coordinator of the interpreting services in the Canary Islands, in an interview with Carmen Valero Garcés (2003: 288), there are cases where asylum seekers take advantage of the interpreting service without actually needing it. When asked whether the interpreter should help the asylum seeker, González Reyes answered:

No, because often the applicants try to deceive the interpreter.
For example, there are cases where immigrants understand and

speak Spanish fluently, but ask for the interpreter in order to gain time to prepare their answer. (Valero Garcés, 2003: 290)

Erich Prunč and Robin Setton (2015: 275), on the other hand, argue that neutrality to all participants may be overridden by a higher moral obligation to compensate for imbalances. The interpreter can achieve this by adapting a lawyer's utterances for an illiterate asylum applicant or a doctor's for a patient.

As stated above, the healthcare setting is the only setting for which the role of the advocate for the powerless participant is acceptable by many. The code of ethics for healthcare interpreters published by NCIHC establishes that:

When the patient's health, well-being, or dignity is at risk, the interpreter may be justified in acting as an advocate. (NCIHC, 2004: 3)

The same approach has been expressed by the California Healthcare Interpreters Association (CHIA) in the organization's professional standards (2002: 14). In addition to that, CHIA's standards address the complexities and possible consequences of this role and urge that the role of a patient advocate remain an optional role for healthcare interpreters.

Although researchers expect untrained interpreters to regard themselves as advocates for the powerless participant (often their relative, a friend, or a compatriot in need), Olcay Şener and Şeyda Kincal (2019) illustrate a completely different situation in Turkey, where unqualified healthcare interpreters who work in private hospitals act as advocates for the hospital, that is for the powerful participant. One of the interpreters interviewed said that, for the purposes of the hospital's financial profit, he is expected to help persuade the patient to undergo further examinations or stay longer at the hospital, even though the patient's condition does not require it. The authors also observed situations where the interpreter did not interpret the patient's questions or did not initially interpret an important document that the patient was supposed to sign (Şener & Kincal, 2019: 212). It should be noted that by omitting such an information, the interpreters violated the ethical principles of accuracy and completeness.

5 Users' expectations

Neutrality and the role of the interpreter in PSI are closely linked to the issue of expectations that participants in interpreted encounters have. Participants

are often unfamiliar with what to expect from the interpreter and their expectations regarding the interpreting are often contradictory, as found by Şeyda Eraslan (2008). Although Eraslan's research tackles the issue of conference interpreting users' expectations, the results may be equally applicable to PSI, where users are known to have highly heterogeneous expectations as well. Eraslan's research suggests that though conference interpreting users expect interpreters to be neutral, uninvolved in the communication process and as faithful to the original as possible, they also expect interpreters to act as a mediator and remove any misunderstandings caused by cultural or other differences (Eraslan, 2008: 20).

Focusing on interpreting in the healthcare setting, Kalina describes how users' expectations may differ within a specific group of users: while some medical experts expect the interpreter to render the original in such a way that is understandable for the patient and to clarify the patient's behaviour, others may consider this conduct as intrusive (Kalina, 2015: 79). Likewise, the clients expect the interpreter to explain to them those majority language speaker's utterances they did not comprehend; only then do clients find the interpreting, which helped them solve the problem at hand, satisfactory (Diabová (ed.), 2014: 4).

One of the first studies aimed at mapping the users' expectations in the public service setting was presented at the 1998 second Critical Link conference by Franz Pöchhacker (2000). In order to analyse what the users expect the interpreter to do in addition to the source-to-target transfer and how interpreters perceive their own role, Pöchhacker gathered data from 629 respondents consisting of doctors, medical personnel, therapists, social workers, and interpreters (both spoken and sign language interpreters). The results have shown that more than eighty percent of users welcome if the interpreter simplifies or explains technical language for the client and that more than seventy percent also welcome if the interpreter summarizes the client's clumsy long utterances.¹³ Coincidentally, the interpreters surveyed also see all these tasks as part of their role. If both users and interpreters share similar views on what

13 For the purposes of comparison, I would like to comment on a study conducted by Salaets and Balogh (2019) among legal interpreters, lawyers, police officers, psychologists, and child support workers. The study focused on legal interpreter-mediated interviews with minors. The results have shown that many respondents expect the court interpreter to explain technical terminology or adapt the language for the child. However, Salaets and Balogh argue that by doing that the interpreter would violate the ethical principle of impartiality and neutrality (Salaets & Balogh, 2019: 29).

the role of the interpreter should consist of, it can be considered as a prerequisite for successful cooperation and hence communication. Regarding the comparison across the user groups, the study has shown that social workers are the most favourable to an interpreter's active involvement in the communication process.

Adopting a similar approach, Jiřina Holcupová (2010) conducted a study among 224 interpreters and 305 representatives of the organizations based in the Czech Republic. Like Pöchhacker, Holcupová (2010: 102) found that users and interpreters more or less agree on what tasks interpreters should perform. However, she found that both groups have rather divergent views on the interpreter's impartiality with half of the users in favour of the interpreter adopting the role of an advocate for the powerful participant, that is the service provider, and more than two thirds of the interpreters against it. Similarly, Kateřina Vávrová, who has studied interpreting in the educational setting, observed that while teachers agree that the interpreter acted as an active participant in the communication process in order to improve the efficiency of the communication, they also believe that the interpreter should act as an advocate for the school rather than an advocate for the client. The interpreters interviewed take the opposite view (Vávrová, 2015: 84).

Several authors argue that this inconsistency is due to the lack of knowledge of the PSI profession among the general public. There are different projects aimed at raising public awareness of the profession. To give one example, in 2014 META, o.p.s. published a brochure *Komunitní tlumočníci ve víru integrace* [Public Service Interpreters in the Midst of Integration], which includes a chapter on how to work effectively with an interpreter. The chapter states, among other things:

Respect the independence and impartiality of the interpreter since these are the principles of his/her work. Requesting the interpreter's opinion on whether the client is lying or telling the truth is inappropriate. (META, o.p.s., 2014: 57)

As Kalina (2015: 80) maintains, the fact that interpreters' behaviour is determined by codes of ethics is often unknown to the clients. However, this knowledge is fundamental for raising the trust of the general public in interpreters. At the same time, better understanding of the role of public service interpreters is seen as a prerequisite for successful professionalization of PSI (Roberts, 1997: 20). The lack of organisation and uniform professional

accreditation in many countries and incorrect understanding of the role of public service interpreters often result in poor remuneration and little recognition of the profession (D'Hayer, 2012: 239), forcing many qualified interpreters to either leave the profession or to stop training further, which in turn hinders the professionalization of PSI. In order to break this cycle, society must come to terms with the fact that PSI should be performed by highly qualified interpreters, who should be paid for their services accordingly. If all members of society understand each other, the benefit to society will far outweigh these costs (Kalina, 2015: 81).

6 Conclusion

The issues of neutrality in PSI, the role of public service interpreters, and PSI users' expectations are interlinked and inseparable and have been addressed by researchers over the last thirty years. Nowadays, it is widely accepted that public service interpreters should interpret accurately and, even though it may be difficult at times, they should maintain a neutral and impartial stance towards all communication parties. Nevertheless, it has also been acknowledged by many that interpreters may alter their behaviour slightly in accordance with the setting in which they interpret and with regard to the possible consequences such behaviour may entail.

Though most of the authors agree on what role(s) public service interpreters should adopt, there is a discrepancy between the theory and the practice, and, as described in the present article, users' expectations are often contradictory to the views generally accepted by researchers and by interpreters. All this shows that PSI merits special attention from the academic community, the general public, and, above all, national and international institutions, which should ensure that well-trained and qualified public service interpreters enjoy professional recognition, support, and remuneration befitting of the important role they play in society.

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Neutralidad en la interpretación en el servicio público. Repensar el papel de los intérpretes en servicios públicos

Palabras clave: interpretación en servicios públicos, interpretación social, neutralidad, imparcialidad, códigos de ética

En el mundo de hoy, los intérpretes en servicios públicos son quienes realizan la mayoría de las interpretaciones. No obstante, existe una gran confusión respecto a la interpretación en servicios públicos (ISP), sobre todo respecto a la neutralidad en ISP y la función del intérprete. Mientras los códigos de ética sostienen que los intérpretes deben llevar a cabo su labor con toda neutralidad e imparcialidad, los usuarios de ISP tienden a ver al intérprete como su defensor, por lo que es difícil para el intérprete mantenerse neutral. En realidad, estudios anteriores han mostrado que mantener una posición neutra representa uno de los retos más importantes para los intérpretes en los servicios públicos. El presente artículo examina los estudios sobre la función del intérprete en los servicios públicos, desde los primeros trabajos acerca del tema (p. ej. Roberts, 1997; Wadensjö, 1998; Pöchhacker, 2000), pasando por otros más recientes (p. ej. Hale, 2008; Kalina, 2015; Valero Garcés, 2015), hasta los más actuales (p. ej. Balogh & Salaets, 2019; Şener & Kincal, 2019; Runcieman, 2020). Utilizando ejemplos específicos, se analizan algunos de los códigos de ética y directrices profesionales. Los autores coinciden en que muchos de ellos son insuficientes y deben reconsiderarse. A lo largo del texto se abordan las diferencias en los ámbitos donde se realiza ISP (p. ej. el ámbito sanitario, educativo, social).

Nevtralnost pri tolmačenju v javnih službah. Premislek o vlogi tolmačev v javnih službah

Ključne besede: tolmačenje v javnih službah, tolmačenje za skupnost, nevtralnost, nepristranskost, etični kodeksi

Kljub temu, da v sedanjem svetu največji delež tolmačenja opravijo prav tolmači v javnih službah (TJS), tovrstno tolmačenje povzroča veliko nejasnosti, predvsem kar zadeva vlogo tolmača in njegovo nevtralnost. Etični kodeksi določajo, da morajo tolmači svoje delo opravljati nevtralno in nepristransko, vendar pa imajo uporabniki TJS tolmača velikokrat za zagovornika, kar mu otežuje zagotavljanje nevtralnosti. Pretekle študije so pokazale, da je ohranjanje nevtralnosti eden največjih izzivov tolmačev v javnih službah. Pričujoči

članek obravnava študije o vlogi tolmača v javnih službah; od prvih raziskav (denimo Roberts, 1997; Wadensjö, 1998; Pöchhacker, 2000), prek novejših (npr. Hale, 2008; Kalina, 2015; Valero Garcés, 2015), do najnovejših (denimo Balogh in Salaets, 2019; Şener in Kincal, 2019; Runcieman, 2020). Analize nekaterih etičnih kodeksov in strokovnih smernic se opirajo na posamezne primere. Številni avtorji se strinjajo, da so mnogi etični kodeksi in strokovne smernice nezadostni in da jih je treba ponovno premisliti. Prispevek zdržema obravnava razlike med področji, kjer se izvaja TJS (denimo v zdravstvenih ustanovah, šolah, socialnih zavodih).

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