COMMUNITY INTERPRETING: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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0. INTRODUCTION

Although, as Martin (2000: 207) says, community interpreting may be described as the oldest among interpreting activities, it has largely been regarded as a lower status undertaking within the profession, i.e. when it has not simply been thrown out or frowned upon as unprofessional. In the African context, a few exceptions notwithstanding, the concept is scarcely seen as an issue for serious discussion as yet. Of course, this may somehow be a simple reflection of the generally rather slow development of formal studies/research on translation and interpretation throughout the continent, where multilingualism is nonetheless the rule rather than the exception. With increasing interest recently in the study and understanding of community interpreting in major Western countries, it is becoming clear that the discipline, though it is still in search of recognition and of a clear-cut definition, cannot just be taken for granted or considered as lower grade interpretation; thus, due to its specific nature, it will have to be given separate treatment within the framework of what is currently known as interpreting studies.

A possible indicator of the fact that there is still little or no agreement on the nature of the discipline can be found in the lack of a standard term in many languages to name the discipline or the practice. In this regard, Martin (ibid: 209) states that the term *community interpreting* is mostly used in America, whereas the preferred term in the United Kingdom is *public service interpreting*. In France, it is not clear as yet whether the practice is *interprétation sociale, interprétation en milieu social*, or even *interprétation communautaire* (cf. Bastin 2001). The same is true of Spain, where three terms have been recorded: *interpretación comunitaria, interpretación social, interpretación en los servicios públicos* (cf. Martin, id.: 206; Kellett Bidoli...). Similar examples surely exist in many other European countries where community interpreting has become somewhat of a reality to reckon with. Yet, no researcher or professional in the area of translation or interpretation today would reasonably dispute the fact that the practice exists. And at a time when interpretation has grown into a widely acknowledged profession and acquired a rather high status thanks largely to conference interpreting with its main attendants –namely simultaneous and consecutive interpretation–, it seems also that no one would be willing to just say "interpreting" where what is actually meant is "community interpreting", as it is currently called by many English speakers. It may also be scientifically unhelpful to do so if one is to better understand the workings of the discipline.

1. DEFINING COMMUNITY INTERPRETING

Whether variation in terminology is anything to go by or not, that may be quite a different issue; but it may well indicate, as many terminologists would argue, that the concept is yet to be properly stabilised. However, it may also be that the stakes are not, *per se*, whether the concept or discipline has a standard name or not; and that it would be more relevant to find out what is in the name, or to put it differently, how the concept can be defined. According to Martin (id.: 208) community interpreting refers to the type of interpreting which caters to the social needs of a community of migrants or persons who, for some reason, do not speak the major language of the larger community and consequently face some prejudice in the exercise of their rights and obligations as far as access to public services is concerned.

The presence of *migrants* as one of the descriptors in this definition is doubtlessly an indication of the main perspective from which community interpreting has been addressed in the West. Indeed, the issue of community interpreting became known in literature, essentially with reference to the language problems faced by migrant populations in major industrialised countries like Canada, Britain, the United States of America and Australia. Since then, the concept has generally been associated with migration. The issue was all the more important as these countries, perhaps with the exception of Canada, had been traditionally known to be characterised by a single official language into which all public business would presumably be carried out. However, the flux of migrants became so real, so persistent and significant that fully-fledged communities speaking the same language and generally sharing the same cultural background were soon formed and properly established. That would be the case, for example, of Mexicans in the United States of America, Chinese in France, non-Spanish speaking African groups in Spain, etc.. With the main language basis of officially monolingual countries thus deeply shaken, it became obvious that, in a world characterised by increasing cross-border population movements or migrations as well as increasing claims for democratic culture, official monolingualism could no longer be seen as equivalent to societal monolingualism. In such a context, community interpreting can legitimately be seen as a particular response to interlingual and intercultural communication needs created by the fast growing transformation of the world into a global village. Here, however, it is interesting to note that mentions of Africa in matters of community interpreting *per se* have tended to be in terms of migrant populations of African origin who have settled in Western countries whose official languages they do not speak. Yet, it is a well known fact that migration is also a reality within the African continent, though of a different kind; especially as population movements and the linguistic mobility which goes with them are mostly caused by civil wars and armed conflicts as witnessed in Angola, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, South Africa, etc., all of which are potential grounds for creating a need for community interpreting at the international level within the continent. Paradoxically, if the continent, with its over 2000 indigenous languages, is probably one of the most complex in terms of linguistic diversity, at the international level it has many fewer shared official languages, including Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish imported from Europe, as well as shared cross-border languages like Hausa, Pidgin English, Swahili, etc.. But it is doubtful whether such shared linguistic resources would render community interpreting less useful in Africa, despite the migration trends and the many refugee camps across the continent. This is surely an issue for further research.

Besides, it would seem that the rationale for community interpreting in Africa is to be orientated towards the Australian rather than the European model of the practice. While the latter is

essentially founded on the language needs of foreign settlers, the former is intended to cater to the language needs of both foreign settlers and speakers of indigenous languages. This brings to mind another important descriptor found in the definition of community interpreting, i.e. *major or majority language* as opposed to *minor or minority language*. Indeed, whether the language concerned is a 'foreign' language or not, it is generally understood that those who create the need for community interpreting are essentially speakers of minority languages. And in this regard, most, if not all, of the 2000 indigenous languages identified across Africa fall squarely into this category. In this respect, from the time of Independence (generally from around 1960), most States of the continent were so much concerned with ensuring the emergence of a national feeling over and above ethnic identities that indigenous/ethnic languages were unavoidably downplayed in favour of a nation-wide means of communication. If such policy orientation was surely very legitimate and justified then, there is little doubt that the wind of democracy currently blowing throughout the continent – with the protection of minorities appearing recurrently as a major request from both the national and the international communities – is likely to lead to higher and higher demands for community interpreting. The reason will not simply be, as Bastin (2001: 753) reports in a statement in defence of community interpreting, that there is no lesser language – even though, as he adds, some languages may boast a more widespread use than others –, but mostly that speakers of a minority language have the right to resort to the language they know best in order to gain access to services in the society in which they live. It is therefore understandable that community interpreting is constantly and almost unavoidably associated with human rights. All the more as it will be noticed that even where some Africans manage to speak the major language for general communication purposes, they may not always achieve efficient communication in certain specifically sensitive (or simply important) areas where perfect mastery of language is however necessary.

It would be noted that minority languages here refer not just to verbal languages like the African indigenous languages of limited diffusion already mentioned, but also to non verbal/spoken languages, including sign languages for the deaf and the dumb (see Bastin, idem). In this connection, a major concern will be the actual recognition and valorisation of a practice which, despite the neglect, has been playing a fundamental role in fostering interlingual communication throughout a typically multilingual continent (cf. Mopoho 2001), but where the bulk of community interpreting involving minority languages is currently done essentially on a volunteer basis and is hardly considered as a profession. This is largely the case with most of those who interpret into and/or from indigenous languages in churches, in courts, in hospitals, for the radio, etc..

Over and above such definitions, Collados Aís et al. (2003) point out the existence of some confusion or indeterminacy in the distinction of different types of interpretation, with an implicit suggestion that a proper definition and understanding of (community) interpreting would very much depend also on a clearer distinction between modes and techniques at work.

2. COMMUNITY INTERPRETING AS A MODE OF INTERPRETING

Modalities refer to the relevant communicative events and physical settings which mark the interpreting job, and which help in identifying such categories known in literature as conference interpreting, court interpreting, escort interpreting, community interpreting, liaison interpreting, etc.

(id: 47ff). Collados Aís et al. argue, however, that modalities of interpreting may be classified under four categories: conference interpreting, court interpreting, liaison interpreting and community interpreting.

Conference interpreting

As Collados Aís et al. (id: 52-53) say, the most distinguishing feature of conference interpreting is that it resorts typically to simultaneous and consecutive interpreting, and is characterised by high professional standards. It is "a highly prestigious mode of interpreting, with exclusive features that distinguish the professional setting of interpretation from that of translation as well as other modes of interpreting". Sub-categories of conference interpreting are said to include media interpreting, diplomatic service interpreting and videoconference interpreting. With the increasing organisation of conferences and seminars on such developmental issues as poverty alleviation, HIV/AIDS, etc., as well as the fast growing media industry (especially rural radio and television programmes) at grassroots levels in Africa, the introduction there of conference interpreting cannot simply be thought of as unrealistic or far-fetched; it will instead need to be envisaged with considerable seriousness.

Community interpreting, court interpreting, health service interpreting, liaison interpreting, etc.

It should be noted that Collados Aís et al. treat each of these under separate headings. However, they point out – and rightly so – that there is hardly any agreement on a standard classification. Indeed, it would seem that most classifications currently available are generally descriptions of specific local situations, with very little or superficial cross-country or cross-model comparison. Collados Aís et al.'s approach to the issue seems closer to the European model than to the Australian model, with the understanding, as we observed earlier, that the latter is likely to be more suitable for Africa than the former.

Community interpreting

They see community interpreting as essentially linked to population displacement or migratory fluxes into industrialised countries for economic or political reasons with the resulting social and human rights problems (educational, health, labour, accommodation, etc.) which such movements pose to host countries. In such cases, they say (id: 55),

> the interpreter is called upon to act as a mediator between a medical team and a patient (emergency services, hospitals, health centres, etc.), between an immigrant and the authorities (immigration office, police station, prison officers, etc.), etc.. Interpreting is therefore a form of mediation where social differences and power relations play an important role, and as a result the job of the interpreter is bound to coincide on many occasions with that of a social mediator. [our translation]

Inasmuch as we agree with the substance of this description which stresses the social and human rights factors in community interpreting, we think that within the African context, just as in the Australian context, this can only be an aspect of the discipline. In point of fact, within such contexts, and in addition to the languages of migrant populations, minority languages would

definitely include virtually all indigenous languages in the list of languages where community interpreting services are needed. For example, Cameroon cannot just content itself with its two official languages (English and French), when it is obvious that many speakers of the 280 indigenous languages available in the country have serious difficulties in gaining access to health services, court services, etc..; similarly, it would not be justifiable to consider as less important the social needs of migrant groups who speak no other languages than say Kinyarwanda (Rwanda), Lingala (the Congos), Sango (Central African Republic), etc..

Court interpreting, health service interpreting, liaison interpreting, etc.

As the name suggests, court interpreting refers to interpretation of court or court-related interaction generally involving the plaintiff, the accused, the attorney, the judges, etc.. and interpretation involving any other judiciary matter. Health service interpreting on the other hand is meant to facilitate effective communication between health officers (medical doctors, nurses, etc.) and patients. These are probably among the most widely mentioned types of 'specialised' interpretation (cf. specialised translation) in the literature, perhaps because of the particularly sensitive nature of interaction in this case, the link between human rights, justice and health, and probably also because of the technical requirements (terminological, procedural, etc.) of the specialist fields. From an African perspective, these fields would also stand out clearly for the same reasons. Indeed, accounts on court interpreting into/from indigenous languages are well known to be a long established tradition across the continent, involving both customary and State judicial systems, even though the current organisation of the long standing practice still leaves much to be desired. Concerning health service interpreting, the practice is probably less publicised than court interpreting, probably because of the generally more private nature of patient-doctor/health worker exchange and also because, in a number of cases, mediation is carried out by the patient's own relative.

Besides the above specialist fields, there is no doubt that other equally interesting fields exist. In their definition of liaison interpreting, which they describe as essentially bidirectional, Collados Aís et al. (id.: 54) mention fields like business negotiation, pre-event visits, guided tours in the tourist sector, etc. which obviously display a certain degree of specialist language. It should be noted however that their categorisation of interpreting fails to account for sign language interpreting which, however, is widely acknowledged today as an important sub-area in the profession (cf. Seleskovitch, Bastin, op cit) . In this regard, sign language is, as mentioned earlier, to be considered as a minority language or language of limited diffusion in the same capacity as many of the 6000 indigenous languages of the world (Bastin, id).

3. COMMUNITY INTERPRETING AND TECHNIQUES OF INTERPRETATION

Techniques refer to the manner in which interpretation is carried out with all what each manner entails in terms of mental processes. From this perspective, three types of interpreting are distinguished: 'bilateral' or 'bidirectional' interpreting, consecutive interpreting and simultaneous interpreting.

'Bilateral' interpretation

It is defined as the type of interpreting where a single oral mediator does the interpreting job, switching from one language to the other accordingly; bidirectional practice is therefore a major characteristic, and interpersonal face to face interaction too, with the interpreter personally playing a key cooperative role in the success of the negotiation, beyond the simple transfer of messages from the parties; here, interpretation is typically done in a conversational mode and the level of interaction may vary significantly from more or less formal to more or less informal. Bilateral interpreting would thus encompass what the literature varyingly describes as dialogue interpreting, liaison interpreting. Reference is specifically made to what is considered as a less felicitous conception where dialogue interpreting is described essentially in terms of face to face interpretation as opposed to conference interpretation, and liaison interpreting is seen as comprising interpreting within the framework of business negotiation and interpreting for social purposes (including community interpreting). This bilateral mode of interpreting is not uncommon in Africa, as interpreters are generally expected to be masters of both working languages of the interpretation process, especially because the relationship between the two is not, as in Europe, that which obtains between a native language and a foreign language, but between an official and a non-official language. There is no guarantee, however, that postulations about the knowledge of working languages by so-called bilingual interpreters are always well-founded.

Consecutive interpretation

The second and third types are probably the best known subtypes of interpretation. To a large extent, there is widespread agreement on their definition. In consecutive interpreting, oral mediation is done only after part or all of the intervention of the speaker, with the understanding that the interpreter and the speaker take turns at speaking. In other words, interpreting is done only when the speaker completes each intelligible chunk of the speech or the entire speech and stops; the interpreter then takes over and interprets the chunk or the entire speech without any interruption from the speaker. While stressing that nowadays, consecutive interpreting represents barely a small and increasingly declining part of the interpreting market, Collados Aís et al. (id: 49-50) indicate that this type of interpreting usually takes place in rather formal settings, where speakers often read from a script; the settings include out-door conferences, receptions, banquets, etc. and other situations with no provision of interpretation equipment. It is likely however that this would remain the main type of interpreting into/from indigenous African languages, until the recognition of the job is fully established and duly valued in each indigenous language community.

Simultaneous interpretation

Simultaneous interpreting is said to include: whispering, with the interpreter usually placed behind –or, one may add, beside if the situation permits the position– the receptor and speaking with a low voice into his/her ear; and relay interpreting, which occurs in situations characterised by a lack of interpreters in a particular language combination among the ones required and, therefore, the interpreter would rely not on the speaker's own utterances, but on another interpreter's oral translation. Collados et al. (id.) argue that simultaneous interpreting may be considered as the

interpretation technique *par excellence* which stands out as characteristic of the professional standards achieved in conference interpreting; it refers to interpreting where the speaker and the interpreter proceed virtually at the same time, i.e. with the interpretation being produced at the very moment the speaker is uttering the message. But what is simultaneous here is not just the superposition of the speaker's utterances and the interpreter's translation, but most importantly the superposition of the interpreter's listening and speaking skills and performance. It is a common practice in international conferences and requires special technical equipment. It is thought that the cultural element in simultaneous interpreting is less problematic than it may be in bilateral interpreting, since participants in such conferences often share more cultural similarities than differences in regard to matters under discussion. Here again, the cultural factor in interpreting from/into African languages will be a matter for further research. It should also be noted that while simultaneous interpretation has contributed enormously to giving the interpreting profession the prestige it now has, it cannot be forgotten that this type of interpretation only dates back to the Nuremberg Trials and thus there may still be some lessons be learned from more traditional types of interpreting, in order, for instance, not to distance itself too much from natural human communication.

A case for a unifying view

The various types of interpreting described so far stand to gain if they are considered as complementary rather than competing or opposing. This is certainly the sense of Pöchhacher's recommendation on "a unifying view of interpreting" (2001: 411) as follows:

> [T]here is something to gain by taking a comprehensive, unifying view on interpreting [...]. [I]t is important to stress that 'conference interpreting' and 'community interpreting' are understood not in terms of a dichotomy but as different areas along a spectrum which ranges from interpreting in an international sphere of an interaction, among representatives of entities based in different 'national' or multinational environments, to interpreting within an institution of a particular society or social community, between individuals and representatives of that institution.

Besides, research on interpreting studies, which is unfortunately still less developed than translation studies, should learn from the latter's mistakes, especially with respect to certain purely linguistic models which at one time founded so much hope on machine translation that they led to the exaggeration of translation problems. It should be noted, in passing, that whereas spoken language has for a long time tended to be regarded as a lower grade of human development than written language, translation scholars are now turning to oral modes of translation (including ordinary, 'natural' interpretation), to fine tune the practice and the theoretical framework. Bearing this in mind, it may be argued that simultaneous interpretation may still have a lot to learn from other types of interpretation. And this is where research on interpretation from and into African languages (most of which are still oral languages, i.e. are yet to have a writing system), including non conference interpreting modes of course, can also contribute to the development of the interpreting discipline in general.

4. STATUS, TRAINING AND ACCREDITATION ISSUES

Accreditation and training are recurrent issues in community interpreting and this may be somehow visible throughout the above paragraphs. The two issues are somewhat closely related. As a matter of fact, with the coming of age of conference interpretation and all its professional attributes, formal training in interpreting has now become a necessary yardstick for obtaining accreditation, i.e. officially recognised, as an interpreter worthy of the name. Yet a good deal of community interpreting is still in the hands of people who have received no formal training in the discipline.

Status in Community interpreting

From Mopoho's (2001) report it might be argued that in matters of social recognition and status, the practice of community interpreting involving minority indigenous languages has witnessed two almost different trends: under and after colonial rule.

Under colonial administration, African interpreters mediating between the colonial masters and speakers of the various indigenous languages generally enjoyed a relatively prestigious position in the local African society. This privileged position was not unrelated to the fact that the mediators were close to power circles and, thus, could influence decision-making (cf. Mopoho, idem: 620ff). In the same connection, they were so greatly respected and feared within the community that some local chiefs/kings became worried, resenting the whole idea of any of their subjects having so much authority over the local community which they traditionally ruled. Another interesting point to note is that the indigenous population did not expect the interpreters to simply act as language mediators; they were also expected to defend the interest of the community and its members. As concerns accreditation, Mopoho's accounts show that there were cases of recruitment by colonial masters of members of the local community to serve as interpreters. Recruitment and training were done generally on the basis of knowledge of the working languages, i.e. the local language and the colonial master's language. Selected candidates were consequently integrated into the colonial administration and earned a relatively high salary by local standards, although the jobs were sometimes unstable and such salaries would normally be the lowest on the scale compared to those earned by the white members of the administration.

Since Independence, interpreting involving an African language on the one hand and a European language on the other as working languages has unavoidably continued, with its most visible manifestations to be found in such settings as churches, courts, hospitals, political meetings, etc.. But many, if not most of those doing the interpreting jobs can hardly claim to be able to earn a living from the practice, as was the case with African interpreters under colonial rule. In a good number of cases today, interpreting in this context is done, on a voluntary basis (cf. Martin 2000: 211-212), by someone who already has something to live on. In many cases of patient-doctor interaction, as earlier discussed, interpretation is simply done by the patient's relative, by cleaners, etc.. Clearly, therefore, interpreting from/into an African language continues to be an activity but is not always seen as a full-fledged job on which one can earn a living; even in cases like interpreting for the church or the court or political meetings, etc. where the activity is regularly assigned only to certain specific members of the community who are deemed fit for the task. And although the criteria for selection may sometimes be less explicit than they were under colonial administration,

there is reason to think that, with few exceptions, the major requirements remain vaguely the same: a good level of education with the European language as medium of instruction, a certain interest or knowledge of the subject field, a mastery of the indigenous language, and in some rare cases the capacity to translate or interpret (cf. Mopoho, 2001: 618; Valero Garcés and Dergam 2003: 262). An in-depth understanding of the trends in such selection criteria would also be an interesting area of research. In any case, there is usually a gross status imbalance between interpretation work involving a non-official indigenous language and the official language (usually of European origin) and interpretation work involving only European languages. While those working in the former category are scarcely considered as professional interpreters, the latter are generally seen as the only ones who deserve to be called professional interpreters. In the same vein, the main targets of formal training are those who belong in the latter category, while those of the former are, again with very few exceptions, essentially self-trained on the job, by trial and error.

Training and Accreditation

Recent studies have, however, shown that the complexity as well as the sensitive and delicate nature of the task is such that community interpreting cannot continue to be left in the hands of untrained practitioners. An eye-opener to the complexity of community interpreting is that almost all classic types of interpreting may become involved at any time (cf. Pöchhacker 2001: 422). Concerning its sensitive and delicate nature, Martin (id: 211ff, 218), quoting R. Fletcher, refers to "a number of horrifying miscarriages of justice"; he further points out anecdotes of wrong diagnoses caused by poor interpretation in hospitals, as well as the need to take into account potential ethical, cultural, and psychological problems, etc. all of which any untrained person or any improvised interpreter may not always be able to identify as such. Consequently, although there is no universally applicable training model, there seems to be agreement to the fact that professional training in community interpreting as well as any other sub-types of interpreting should be able to offer the following as basics: cognitive and linguistic/discourse competence (cf. Seleskovitch 1968; Déjean Le Féal 1997; Jones 1999), a mastery of relevant professional ethics, including awareness of norms, issues of faithfulness, etc.. Moreover, there is specific need for training in community interpreting to stress other skills relating to the following: knowledge of usage, of the social context, the social, cultural, educational, ... backgrounds of those for whom interpretation is meant; etc.; depending on cases, the interpreters will also have to be sensitive to daily habits of the participants, their respective concepts of family, community, generation gap, gender relations, honour, faith and religion, social stereotypes, justice, equality, etc.. (see Valero Garcés and Dergam, id: 263; Viaggio 2003: 17). As can be observed in "Resources for Professional Development of Spanish Court Interpreters" available at www.judiciary.state.nj.us/interpreters/index.htm, the trend seems to be for the total rejection of improvised practice in favour of training community interpreters at university level (see also Bastin 2001: 752). But curricular frameworks still vary significantly from one training programme to another, in terms of content, duration, and certification. Hence, the problem of harmonisation of at least what may be considered as common core and the basic framework for training in community interpreting. Anyhow, definition and harmonisation of criteria for Europe, as has been requested (Bastin, id.), may not necessarily work perfectly for multilingual African countries. Besides, success will also depend on the upstream resolution of such problems as: getting required support from government institutions and funding bodies, getting candidates in enough numbers who fulfil the minimum entry requirements for training, recruiting and training trainers, raising awareness among users of community interpreting services, etc..

Whatever model is finally adopted, community interpreting will only be recognised as a respectable profession if practitioners effectively undergo formal training. And formal training should also make professional accreditation easier. But such accreditation will in turn depend on the existence of properly defined accreditation criteria and professional norms, preferably at national and international levels (cf. Bastin, id.). And these requirements and norms will, naturally, set the pace for quality standards, assurance and assessment.

5. QUALITY IN COMMUNITY INTERPRETING

Looking at history, one may argue that the development of community interpreting as a concept and sub-discipline has justifiably come about not only to bring out the specific nature of the practice in comparison notably with the practice which prevails in conference interpreting, but most particularly because of the realisation that despite the fundamental differences, the practice needs to achieve a high level of quality too. Indeed, although the practice of community interpreting is usually associated with interactions involving less privileged groups and less cosy settings (i.e. as compared to what obtains in rather comfortable and cosier conference settings with participants usually drawn from the highest social ranks), in-depth studies carried out in relatively recent years have revealed that, in terms of quality, it is just as demanding as, and sometimes even more demanding than, conference interpreting (Pochhacker 2001). Unfortunately, many continue to consider the latter as the only really professional mode of interpreting, despite indications that community interpreting may, depending on situations, involve the same techniques used in simultaneous and consecutive interpretation.

Before proceeding to a briefly discuss the issue, here is a statement by Kellett Bidoli's (2003: 267) which provides a tentative definition and background information.

> 'Quality' is a degree of excellence, a relative, intangible essence, which is perceived by each one of us in a unique manner. Its enigmatic nature renders any measurement or assessment of it extremely arduous and challenging. Research on interpreting quality first centred on linguistic aspects and then turned to other numerous non-linguistic characteristics of performance (especially in the simultaneous spoken mode) as well as factors external to the interpreter such as lightning and noise.

It should also be observed that in general, before serious empirical studies began to be carried out, interpreters were presumably expected, among other things, to be faithful, to be neutral/objective, to be perfect bilinguals, etc.. Interpreters themselves had their own personal idea/opinion of what good interpreting should be: so, some thought a good interpreter should have the eloquence of great orators, etc.. What about the revelation by Mopoho (op. cit.) that African interpreters in the days of colonial rule were expected to defend their interest while doing their job! Could that also be a pointer to quality expectations? From Mopoho's accounts, African interpreters were, rightly or wrongly, thought to be endowed with special powers of cross-linguistic (and maybe cross-cultural) transmission and of manipulation.

In any case, empirical research on quality assessment around the world is still a relatively new topic in community interpreting. And according to a meticulous review by Kurz (2001: 397-403), there is an unfortunate lack of comparability across most of the existing studies. Hence, the relevance of Pöchhacker recommendation for the setting of quality standards across the board,

applicable not only to community interpreting, but to interpreting in general, since different types of interpreting display a significant degree of complementarity.

However, despite much inconsistency and variability in the approaches and the results, a number of recurrent issues call for the need to consider some key criteria in the design and administration of similar studies as well ensuring future comparability. Looking at Kurz's (id: 395ff) and Pöchhacker's proposals, criteria may include the following (the list is by no means exhaustive):

- *The context/situation:* the context or situation within which interpreting takes place is 'critically important'. And situationality here refers to such parametric questions as "who is talking to whom, to what purpose, and with what possible effect," the simple reason being that "different listeners in the same situation may have different expectations", not to mention that different listeners in different situations may equally have different expectations. The situation will enable the researcher to choose or clearly identify what has been described as modes of interpreting: conference, escort/guide, court, chuch, etc.

- *Choice of focus:* the researcher should also decide what the precise focus of the assessment is. For example, it should be clear whether the focus is user expectations (about interpreting services) and/or responses (to/during a particular interpretation at a meeting), user reactions (to interpreter's performance), user attitudes, user satisfaction, etc..

- *Choice of interpreting technique:* i.e. whether interpretation is simultaneous or consecutive. (cf. Martin, op.cit.)

- *Choice of informants:* they may be conference participants, including speakers and listeners, the interpreters themselves, fellow interpreter/team member, the client or employer, etc. and consideration may need to be given to other criteria as gender, age, experience, etc. (see Pöchhacker 2001: 412)

- *Data collection method:* it must be decided and justified whether data should be collected through the administration of a questionnaire and/or corpus (tape recording of interpretation performance); it is strongly advised, however, to combine both questionnaire and corpus methods for more comprehensive analysis. (cf. Pöchhacker, id.)

- *Data analysis:* could, for instance, take a descriptive approach (through corpus-based observation) or a prescriptive approach (questionnaires on attitudes, opinions, etc.);

In any case, researchers on quality in interpreting are advised to ensure suitability of measurement instruments and adequacy of such instruments with mode and techniques of interpreting.

CONCLUSION

It is hard to draw steadfast conclusions at this juncture, especially as the study from the onset was intended essentially as a projection of Africa's position with respect to current trends in community interpreting. The study therefore attempted a survey of some literature, with particular focus on the definition of the concept itself, categories of community interpreting, issues of status, training, accreditation and quality. The main lesson that may be learned could be that practice of community interpreting in the African context is seemingly closer to the Australian model than to the European model. Accordingly, any other issue concerning the highly needed organisation of the

profession, status, accreditation, training and quality standards, assurance and assessment will need to bear the requirement in mind.

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