INTERPRETERS AT THE HUB OF DISCIPLINES

Ann Corsellis OBE

Introduction

It is an interesting coincidence that this symposium is taking place within weeks of the implementation of the common European Arrest Warrant, beginning with seven member states. I understand that the first warrant has been issued in respect of a Swede in Spain and I imagine that, yet again, interpreters have been at the hub.

I am grateful to be invited to share ideas with you on this important subject. My own background is in the public services and, although I am neither a linguist nor an academic, for the last twenty years my work has centred around bringing attention to the role of interpreters at the centre of the public service professional and academic disciplines. The demand for a rapid creation of solid formal structures for public service linguists, in response to pressing social need, has meant going back to first principles. For that reason, exploring what is happening in this context demonstrates interesting implications for the rest of the language profession.

The facts

There is a series of facts that are currently mismatched. In broad terms it goes like this:

1. The UK, along with most other countries, is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural society. 30% of London schoolchildren speak at home one of more than 400 languages spoken in our capital, as well as English (Baker and Eversley 2000).

2. Public services are required by law and good practice to deal equally with every individual, irrespective of language and culture.

3. Dr. Philida Schellekens (2001 p.vi of Executive Summary), in her report to the Department for Education and Employment, estimated that there were between one and one and a half million people whose command of English was not sufficient for them to function adequately for the purposes of employment or education.

4. She also points out the time it takes for an individual to acquire an adequate functional command of English

5. Despite dedicated work on the part of many, the National Register of Public Service Interpreters comprises only two thousand public service interpreters, at various levels and in about 100 languages with English, to serve the whole of the UK.

6. Proficiency in a second language, to a level that would enable service providers to deliver their expertise in a language and culture other than

English, is rarely formally recognised in this context, except in the legal profession where language and law degrees are well established.

It would anyway be a logistical nightmare, in London for example, to match the bilingual service providers with individual clients who may speak any of the 400 languages. Therefore interpreters are the normal response.

7   Many of the languages needed are not normally on offer in the UK education system either as taught classes or within the examinations framework. In addition, there is a recent and increasing demand for languages which are new to this country, and therefore interpreters cannot be found in established language communities.

8 Errors and inadequacies in interpreting are proving costly in terms of resources and distress. Last year, for example, the UK was found by the courts to be in violation of ECHR Article 6 para 3 in the case of Cuscani v.UK.2002 All ER (D) 139 (Sept)[1].

Implications

Recognising the overall context

It is essential to have a precise sense of the whole if one is to make sense of the interpreters' pivotal position within it. The framework model of delivery of public services across languages and cultures (Corsellis 1995: 69) is at appendix 1. This sets out in simple form the seven stages of service provision in box A and the skills needed for each stage at box B . This model does not differ greatly from that used in other contexts, such as exporting goods and services across languages and cultures in the commercial field.

Strength of the hub

If interpreters are to be central to this framework they have to be a lot more robust, both individually and collectively, than they are now.
Interpreters think of themselves as a profession. It came as a surprise to the public service disciplines that interpreters were not a profession in the way they understood the term. Public service disciplines are regulated professions and they expect members of other disciplines who work alongside them to be regulated professions too. Regulated professions arise where the client is not in a position to assess the quality of service at the point of delivery and trust has to be engendered so far as is

---

[1] In this case, on being informed that Mr Cuscani had difficulty communicating in English the court had adjourned and directed that an interpreter be present at the next hearing. No interpreter was present at the next hearing, however, and Mr. Cuscani's representative offered to make do using the services of a family member where necessary. Mr Cuscani later appealed the custodial sentence he was given on the grounds that he had not fully understood the nature of the case to which he was pleading.

humanly possible. One does not cheerfully allow someone to remove one's appendix, defend one in court or teach one's children on the basis that they may have a GCSE or A level in a related subject and think they would be awfully good at it. That logic also applies to linguists.

It is worth repeating the definition that a profession is a group of people who share a common expertise and *profess* to a code of conduct which is for the protection of their clients, their colleagues and their body of knowledge and which goes beyond self-interest. In order to meet what is required by their code, professions create nationally recognised, transparent and consistent criteria for:
- selection
- training and in-service training
- assessment and accreditation
- good practice guidelines

Lack of regulation made public service colleagues nervous about interpreters. Public service professionals are responsible for the decisions they make. The quality of those decisions derives in large part from the quality of the information on which they are based. Unless they and their other- language- speaking clients can trust in the scrupulous accuracy and impartiality of the interpreter, they feel at risk.

Sadly, this lack of collective professional structure also gave rise to interpreters being, among other things, badly paid (recognised qualifications against rates of fees), exploited (translations by yesterday) and pressured into breaking their own codes of conduct (take this witness statement/medical case history by yourself or you won't be employed again).

Status has to be earned. It cannot be given. Over the last twenty years professional structures have been set up for public service interpreters to match the regulated professions of public service colleagues (see appendix 2). They are now more or less in place and what remains is to build capacity within those structures to meet the demand. Already, it is clear that a cohesive professional structure is strengthening public service interpreters and improving their quality and confidence. This is the model that has been accepted by the EU Commission as part of the process of establishing equivalent standards in legal interpreting and translation.

Linguists working in other fields have supported these developments. Many have generously given unstintingly of their time, help and advice. They have never appeared to mind the late night phone call from a colleague standing in a police station or Accident andEmergency department looking for a vital item of terminology in another language. They have willingly drawn on their expertise to provide translations for such terms as "defective brake linings", "off-side rear bumper" or even "amniocentesis". In the process they may have learned terminology relating to the drug and sex trades that was outside their normal experience but they took that seriously too as part of their Public Service colleagues' job. Indeed the members of the Institute of Linguists subsidised the National Register over a considerable time. They have also gained insights into the benefits of regulating a profession.

It is interesting to note that now the Institute of Linguists is in the initial stages of applying for a Royal Charter that will include the eventual designations of chartered

linguist for eligible individual linguists working in contexts other than public service interpreting. After all, even in the commercial world, people do not turn to any self-assessed accountant or engineer. They turn to chartered accountants and chartered engineers. .

Inter-disciplinary connections

If we are to consider interpreters as a hub, then we must consider how the spokes connect to the hub. In the public service context, members of each discipline are trained in how to work with members of other disciplines. Inter-disciplinary conventions have been developed over time and are carefully observed. In court the judges, defence and prosecution lawyers, the police and ushers have clearly defined roles. In hospitals doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and paramedics recognise and respect each other's expertise. The public service interpreter becomes a member of an inter-disciplinary team.

The public services are one of only two contexts I am aware of where colleagues from other disciplines are formally trained to work with linguists. The other one involves the conflict and conciliation interpreters who work with military personnel and aid workers. Many of you may have read Major Roy Thomas's (2003) work and know of his dedicated efforts to safeguard these interpreters during and after their assignments. While we may worry about not being paid, they worry about not being shot.

In the public services this parallel training is implemented in a variety of ways. One of the best is to train interpreters and the colleagues they are to work with together. This dual training is very practical. Role-play critiques include comment on how the police officer or the doctor has performed: whether they encoded clearly, paused for consecutive interpreting or spoke at a reasonable pace for whispered simultaneous interpreting. Texts for translation are analysed together. I had the pleasure of working with West Midlands Probation Service to devise a system for them to assess these skills in working across languages and cultures. It is designed to match, where possible, the Languages National Training Organisation's National Occupational Standards for Interpreters so that parallel check lists of skills are used by those inviting interpreters for an assignment and interpreters considering which assignments to accept.. There must be openings for enterprising academic departments, both in languages and other fields, to collaborate with their colleagues in business in this way..

Progress has been gained through powerful combinations of disciplines, once mutual professional trust has been established. We have led our public service development work with the legal system, mainly because they cannot normally do as much irreversible damage as the health service, have an appeal process and a respect for words. It is now the legal services that are pressing the UK government for funding for legal interpreters and translators in order for them to meet their legal obligations. It was the European Union Commission's Directorate General for Justice and Home Affairs that funded three successive international projects on legal interpreting and translation and, as a consequence, produced a Green Paper on minimum legal procedural safeguards that devoted a whole chapter to standards of legal interpreting and translation.

Co-ordination of disciplines

The notion of a hub denotes an organised structure, as opposed to random events. Who does the organising?

I know nothing about academic organisational structures but it does appear to an outsider that there is an absence of national co-ordination over languages. South Africa has a language policy, which looks at both the underlying principles and their implementation. I don't see a UK government producing anything similar in the near future or until a critical mass of success has been reached. Therefore it would seem to me that Nick Byrne, Chairman of the Association of University Language Centres, is right in suggesting that, instead of passively waiting for Them, academic and practicing linguists will have to take responsibility for their own future, identify what is needed on a national basis and allocate objectives among themselves accordingly. It is recognised that this will not be easy and that vested interests and traditional approaches will have to be challenged and accommodated.

Nor am I up-to-date with the finer points of public service management. When I started my career there was "administration" which was often so smooth and seamless one did not realise it existed. After a career break to have a family I returned to find "management" had taken over.

I suspect there are three stumbling blocks in these new arrangements. The first arises because managers are not usually members of the professions relating to their sphere of work, so that their intuitive decisions are based on other criteria. The second is that, in order to collect and collate a modicum of relevant information, a good deal of money, time and energy is spent on devising and filling in forms (e.g. patient dependency scores). The third may be connected with the short term "targets" by which managers are appraised and paid. There are also the linguistic and cultural dissonances whereby five year olds are referred to as "cost units" and the speed of hearing court cases as "thruput".

These managers may therefore employ interpreters, in the health service for example, who are either untrained or have been assessed as qualified at under GCSE level and are expected to carry out a multiplicity of additional tasks for which they are neither trained or paid nor possibly even insured. The result is a cosmetic, risk-laden compromise to achieve short-term cost savings. Until the role of the linguist is fully recognised and understood by public service management, and included in their "targets", there will be difficulties in implementing what is needed. So I am now considering relevant training for managers in what is needed to co-ordinate the range of disciplines in terms of deployment, employment and support strategies.

Academic disciplines

The need

When I first arrived to work in the health service in Cambridge, I took care to make conversation with an obviously competent Scottish ward sister with a crisp

Morningside accent, who could probably have dealt with the apocalypse and the second coming without creasing her starched apron. I tentatively began by saying,

"It must be most interesting to look after patients who are academics"
"They don't die well", she replied tersely.
"Oh?"
"They think that nothing significant can happen until they have finished researching it. They tend to meet their Maker with a look of pained surprise on their faces".

Well, the practical realities have overtaken any academic base. Significant steps are having to be taken very rapidly in the public service arena. My own degree was in history. I was brought up with the notion that the purpose of academic work was to make sense of reality and I have always assumed that applies to other academic disciplines. Informed academic work is sorely needed to underpin and evaluate what is happening in this aspect of the public services.

The approach

When we started the original development work in the 1980's, I took a careful look at how new ideas had been incorporated into the public services. The last fifty years have seen the successful adoption by the public services of vast changes in the scientific field but less in the area of the humanities and almost nothing in terms of linguistics. The cause for this may lie in the different approaches. In the humanities, researchers gather data, write up their results and analyses and then publish texts to be read mostly by other academics. These outcomes have at times done little to establish good relations with public service practitioners, especially if they carried morally superior overtones.

Science-based applied researchers, working with a view to the development of practical benefits, take a wholly different tack. Their starting point is collaboration with the public service disciplines and often with their clients. Together, they:

• define the problem
• develop the solution
• pilot and evaluate the solution
• disseminate it through the service in ways which are accessible.

Such a collaborative approach is relevant for linguists and it was applied to our public service interpreter development work. Furthermore, there is a need for academic linguists also to work in collaboration with academics from other relevant disciplines. For example, the Urdu word for a mistake is perilously near the English word "guilty", which means whether or not the defendant did the crime. Islamic religious and legal frameworks are synonymous. It could be and, one suspects it has been, the case that a Muslim defendant could admit to making a mistake and to committing a moral sin and not be "guilty" in the English legal definition of the term. In this instance there is a need for academic linguists, anthropologists and lawyers to work together to produce understanding and guidance to inform practice.

It should also be noted that, on the whole, public service personnel do not read extensive professional literature. When they have spent a day dealing with death and mayhem, they are not disposed to read improving articles on how they might have done it better. The collaborative approach is more in tune with their normal dissemination strategies.

Funding

Good academic work requires proper continuing financial support and we all know the difficulties of gaining access to such support. In this context, public services do not normally have relevant research funds of their own and government departments normally only fund research projects to progress government policy. In the UK we were fortunate to gain development funding over fourteen years, mainly from private charitable trusts with some help from the legal services. It is often European funding that is now being used to take forward international projects and some UK developments, often in collaboration with another discipline.

There are of course the dwindling sources of funding for post-graduate work. I am happy to say that I am beginning to receive copies of PhD theses, on public service interpreting and translating, from the UK and abroad. On the other hand, many of these students would do much better if they were supervised by tutors who were at least familiar with earlier development work and with the basic principles of the public service structures, ethical procedures and good practice standards. It is perhaps an inevitable stage in the continuum of development but it wastes a good deal of time, money and opportunities. Fortunately, there is a slowly increasing number of practicing public service interpreters taking on post-graduate study and of academic linguists who are qualifying as public service interpreters.

It is, however, interesting to note that the academic partners of formally regulated professions are likely to have access to better funding. It is also true that proposals made by linguists in conjunction with the more powerful disciplines, such as Law and Health, may have more chance of success.

Concluding remarks

The public service context is one of the foremost, and perhaps one of the most exciting, modern developments for the language profession. Public Service Iinterpreters are taking their place at the very centre of the new social infrastructure of our multi-lingual countries. Access to interpretation and translation should be seen as a human rights issue, and not only a response to international treaties: as a practical and enriching means of living together and not only a grudging duty.

I suggest that what is emerging applies more widely and that includes the need for:

- the establishment of a formal language profession
- quality standards for the training, assessment, practice and employment of interpreters and translators to be established at government level – against which any relevant government and public service tenders should be defined and monitored

- education of the general public in   the role of linguists: interpreters, translators, bilingual professionals and educationalists
- transparent and consistent language policies and strategies at every level
- funding for training, course development and both pure and applied research

The UK is by no means alone in either identifying the challenges or putting solutions in place. The fourth international conference for public service interpreters took place in Stockholm in May. These conferences, called the Critical Link series, were started by a group of robust Canadians to bring together people from all over the world who are interested in public service interpreting. They demonstrate clearly that not only are linguists the hub of disciplines, they are the hub of contemporary international social change in ways they have never been before.

corsellis@dial.pipex.com

Appendix 1

FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROVISION OF PUBLIC SERVICES ACROSS LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

> **A Providing a service includes the following tasks, which are the responsibility of the public service in question:**

1. **Finding out about the client(s) and their requirements**
2. **Preparing the service to meet those requirements**
3. **Giving information about the service to the client(s)**
4. **Exchanging information and negotiating decisions with client(s)**
5. **Delivering an appropriate service**
6. **Quality Assurance**
7. **Researching and developing the service**

> **B.** *by using, at each stage, the combination of professional skills below:*

COMMUNICATION	SERVICE DELIVERY	MANAGEMENT
1.Interpreters 2.Translators 3.Language aware personnel 4.Bilingual service personnel	5. Service professionals with relevant expertise	6. Planners, organisers, researchers with relevant expertise

> **C.** *each skill (in B above) is made available through consistent, transparent:*

1. **Selection**
+
2. **Training**
+
3. **Assessment at appropriate levels**
+
4. **Observance of code of ethics and good practice**
+
5. **Appropriate employment arrangements**
+
6. **Deployment**
+
7. **Support and Continuous Professional Development**

Bibliography

Baker, Philip and Eversley, John (eds.). 2000. *Multi-lingual Capital: The languages of London's schoolchildren and their relevance to economic, social and educational policies.* London: Battlebridge.

Corsellis, Ann. 1995. *Non-English Speakers and the English Legal System: A Handbook in Good Practice for Those Working in the Legal System Across Language and Culture*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, Institute of Criminology.

Corsellis, Ann and Ostarhild, Edda. 2001. "Training: At First Degree and Initial Professional Level." In: E. Hertog, (ed.), *Aequitas. Access to Justice across Language and Culture in the EU.* Antwerp: Lessius Hogeschool, 105-117.

Corsellis, Ann and Felix Fernández, Leandro. 2001. "Code of Ethics and Conduct and Guidelines to Good Practice." In: E. Hertog, (ed.), *Aequitas. Access to Justice across Language and Culture in the EU*. Antwerp: Lessius Hogeschool, 147-165..

Corsellis, Ann. 2001. "Turning Good Intentions into Good Practice: Enabling the Public Services to Fulfil their Responsibilities." In R.P. Roberts et al. (eds.), *The Critical Link 2: Interpreters in the Community: Selected papers from the Second International Conference on Interpreting in Legal, Health and Social Service Settings, Vancouver, BC, Canada, 19–23 May 1998* Amsterdam: Benjamins, 89-102..

Corsellis, Ann, Hertog, Erik, Ringe Martinsen, Bodil , Ostarhild-Jones, Edda and Van den Bosch, Yolanda. 2003. "European Equivalencies in Legal Interpreting and Translation." In L. Brunette et al. (eds.), *The Critical Link 3: Interpreters in the Community: Selected papers from the Third International Conference on Interpreting in Legal, Health and Social Service Settings, Montréal, Quebec, Canada 22–26 May 2001*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 293-305.

Critical Link Canada: National Council for the Development of Community Interpreting / Maillon Essentiel Canada: conseil national pour le développement de l'interprétation en milieu social. (Programmes and proceedings of Critical Link 1 to 4)
 http://www.criticallink.org/English/conference_papers.htm#criticallink1/2/3/4
Accessed 29 March 2005.

Schellekens, Philida. 2004. *English language as a barrier to employment, education and training.* London: Department for Education and Employment.

Thomas, Roy. 2003. "Languages on the Front Line." In *The Linguist 42 (3),* 84-88.

Torres Díaz, María Gracia, Grollmann, Doris and Marquant, Hugo. 2001. "Training: At Professional Postgraduate MA Level." In: E. Hertog, (ed.), *Aequitas. Access to Justice across Language and Culture in the EU.* Antwerp: Lessius Hogeschool, 117-125