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A Study on Public Services Interpreting (PSI) in Catalonia: defining a new emerging professional profile

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Miras Research Group

MIRAS: Mediación y Interpretación: investigación en el ámbito social

[Mediation and Interpreting: research in the social sphere]
Research project – background

The Catalan context:

- 41 “comarques”
- 2 official languages (Catalan, Spanish)
- Unequal distribution of migrated population
Research project – background

- The Catalan context:
  No specific regulation for PSI organization:

  [...] it is necessary to organize a system to help the communication between professionals and users. This communication must rely on (face to face, by phone or written) translation systems to different languages. Each region will have to adequate the system to its linguistic needs [...] (p. 57)

  Citizenship and Immigration Plan (2005-08) issued by the Immigration Office of the Welfare and Family Department of Catalonia Autonomous Government (Generalitat)
Research project – background

- The Catalan context: organization of PSI services
  - **Legal and police interpreting:**
    - A translation and interpreting agency is selected through open tender
    - Freelance translators cannot directly apply for it
  - **Health care:**
    - Telephone interpreting
    - Some agreements with PSI providers
    - Intercultural mediators in some hospitals
Research project – background

The Catalan context: organization of PSI services

- **Education:**
  - 4 associations (located in Barcelona) selected by open tender
  - Telephone interpreting

- **Social services** (housing, immigration offices, employment):
  - PSI provided by local councils (comarques)
  - Associations
Research project – objectives

THREE STAGES:

1. Compilation of a significant data corpus from the triple perspective of interpreters, users and the Public Administration
2. Corpus data analysis (work in progress)
3. Based on the results, elaboration of guidelines and proposals for a university programme that may help create this new emerging professional profile
Research project – Methodology

FIRST STAGE:
1. Data collection:

- Mediators and interpreters
- Users
- Public Services providers

COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTION
Methodology – data collection

• **Design of the surveys:**
  - Close-ended questions (multiple choice, categorical, scales, numerical...)
  - Open ended questions

• **Translation into:**
  - [Interpreters and mediators] Catalan and Spanish
  - [Users] Catalan, Spanish, English, French, Chinese, Russian, Romanian
  - [Public Service providers] Catalan
Methodology – data collection

Translation of the survey - Chinese

1. ¿Tiene problemas para comunicarse cuando acude a los servicios públicos?
   1. 您到国家服务部门去办事时，有没有沟通问题？
   □ Sí 有 □ No 没有 □ A veces 偶尔有

¿En cuáles?
哪些部门？
□ Hospitales y centros de salud 医院和医疗中心
□ Policía, juzgados 警察局和法院
□ Servicios sociales 社会福利部门
□ Escuelas 学校
□ Oficinas de atención al ciudadano 便民服务办公室
□ Otros ¿cuáles? 其它，哪些？ ..........................
Methodology – data collection

Translation of the survey - Arabic

1. هل لديك صعوبة في التعبير عندما تلجأ إلى الخدمات العامة؟
   □ نعم □ لا □ أحياناً

في أي خدمة؟

□ المستشفيات ومراكز الصحة (CAPs)
□ الشرطة والمحاكم
□ المدارس
□ الخدمات الاجتماعية
□ مكاتب توجيه المواطنين
□ أخرى، ما هي؟ ........
Methodology – data collection

Distribution of the survey:

- Interpreters and mediators: mainly through local councils
- Users: at adult education centres, at their own shops and businesses, through some interpreters/mediators
- Public Service providers:
  - Schools – through the Catalan Education Department
  - Hospitals
Methodology – data analysis

Mixed approach

**Quantitative:** designing of a data base and statistical analysis through SPSS
→ close ended questions

**Qualitative:** discourse analysis
→ open ended questions
Results

• Number of responses + analysis:
  – **Interpreters and mediators:** 51 surveys – analysed
  – **Users:** 63 surveys – analysed
  – **Public Service providers:** work in progress
Results: Interpreters and mediators

- Profile of the sample: age and sex
  - 75.5% between 20 and 40 years old
  - 79.6% women
Results: Interpreters and mediators

Profile of the sample:

- 51% have studied at a University level
- 21.6%, at secondary school
Results: Interpreters and mediators

- **Mother tongue:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazigh</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-African</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian subcontinent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazigh</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Arabic: 13 (25%)
Amazigh: 11 (21%)
Spanish: 8 (15%)
Results: Interpreters and mediators

First non-native language:

- Catalan: 29.5%
- Spanish: 15.7%
- Arabic: 9.8%
- Amazigh: 9.8%
- English
- Chinese
- Romanian
- German
- Armenian
- French
- Dutch
- Japanese
- Russian
- Wolof
Profile of the sample:

- Few respondents (10%) have received specific training for PSI
  - Especially short courses (20 h.)
- Many have been trained for mediation
  - In courses organized by public institutions, NGOs, associations...
Results: Interpreters and mediators

Short professional experience:
How long have you been working as an interpreter or mediator for Public Services?

71.4% → 0-5 years in this field
Results: Interpreters and mediators

Kind of employment:
- 58.1% → occasionally
- 23.3% → full-time
- 18.6% → part-time
- 56.8% → have other jobs

Job unstability:
- 39.5% → freelance
- 37.2% → employment contract
- 23.3% → internship
Results: Interpreters and mediators

Interpreting techniques:
- 81.3% → liaison interpreting (after short sentences)
- 33.3% → chuchotage
- 20% → after long interventions (taking notes)
- 20% → sight translation

FIRST vs. THIRD person:
- 87.8% → use third person
- 12.2% → use first person
Results: Interpreters and mediators

Service providers talk to...
- The interpreter (27.7%)
- Users (21.5%)
- It depends on the case (43.5%)

Users talk to...
- The interpreter (43.5%)
- Service providers (13%)
- It depends on the case (43.5%)

*More than a half of the sample do not receive information prior to the interpretation service*
Results: Interpreters and mediators

Main difficulties interpreters and mediators encounter:

- Dialects: 5 (11.4%)
- Memory: 8 (15.7%)
- Lack of trust: 9 (17.6%)
- Overlapping speeches: 15 (29.4%)
- Specific terminology: 16 (31.4%)
- Lack of clarity: 19 (37.3%)
Results: Interpreters and mediators

Positive perceptions:

😊 96% of the sample like their job as interpreters or mediators
😊 58.8% feel PSI provision is good coordinated
😊 58.8% think PSI salary is appropriate

Even though...

47% of the sample feel the profession lacks clear definition
Profile of the sample:

- **Sex:** 50.8% men; 49.2% women
- **Age:** 72.9% → 20-40 years old
- **Countries of origin**
  - China: 42.9%
  - Morocco 11.1%
  - Russia 11.1%
  - Other 63.1%
- **Average time of residence in Catalonia:** 2-3 years
Results: Users

- Do you have problems when communicating with PS providers?

- 52% Yes
- 33% No
- 13% Sometimes
- 2% N/A
How do you communicate with PS providers?

Results: Users

- Family and friends: 28
- Interpreters and mediators: 16
- Multilingual multimedia material: 5
- Drawing: 6
- Signs: 11
- Other languages: 4
- English: 9
- Simplified Spanish: 46
Results: Users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Helpers&quot;</th>
<th>Proportion of sample</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Fidelity (towards users)</th>
<th>Fidelity (towards PS providers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends from same country</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends from Catalonia who also speak the migrants language</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>72,2%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional interpreters or mediators</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td><strong>90.5%</strong></td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Low proportion of use of professional interpreters, but high degree of satisfaction
## Results: users

- **Most valued in an interpreter or mediator:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Good command of languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Seriousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Positive attitude towards their job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Patience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Good knowledge of both cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>Friendliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Neutrality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Neutrality, the last in the ranking... Interpreter as an advocate?
Conclusions

- The data collected confirms our previous hypothesis:
  - Communication problems still exist at Public Services
  - Most of users surveyed do not usually receive the help of interpreters or mediators

- Low proportion of professionals have been trained specifically for PSI

- Young profession... and also, precarious, unstable and undefined
And now... what?

MIRAS' work need to walk towards...

- Design of specific training courses
- Coordination with Public Administration and private companies + assessment on their needs
- Grant and increase quality in PSI
- Development of a system of accreditation for interpreters
GRÀCIES - THANKS!

http://grupsderecerca.uab.cat/miras