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Linking Community Interpreting Research with Intercultural Communication Theories: Methodological Approach to the Specific Case of the Chinese in Catalonia¹

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Since globalization has enhanced intercultural exchanges almost on a daily basis, plenty of research has been undertaken to elucidate the sources of misunderstanding between cultures. Disciplines such as intercultural pragmatics, social psychology or ethnography, have been developed to shed light on topics of intercultural communication. However, too little attention has been paid to the significance that these theories could have in community interpreting research. Therefore, on the basis of an overview of the literature produced specifically for the case of communication between Chinese and Western cultures, the present contribution aims to point out how a better understanding of intercultural communication patterns could help researchers of community interpreting between distant cultures. It also presents the example of a methodological approach to this topic through a case study, while arguing that community interpreting research should take into account the specificities of particular pairs of languages and cultures.

Keywords: community interpreting, intercultural communication, qualitative research, Public Service interpreting

1 Introduction

After getting an overview of the literature produced on community interpreting research, I discovered that even though community interpreted encounters are excellent examples of intercultural communication, there still seems to be a gap between both fields of studies, with many theories from intercultural communication left to be explored empirically through community interpreting research.

Based on the first part of the PhD research project on “Public Services translation, interpreting and mediation for the Chinese community in Catalonia”,² this paper focuses on the description of the conceptual framework and methodological approach to this topic.

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Therefore, the first part of the present paper aims at pointing out some of the theories from intercultural communication studies that could be applied in the analysis of community interpreting interactions, especially those with the Chinese community. The paper intends to raise some questions that could be addressed not only in further research, but also in community interpreters' training courses, even if just as "food for thought" in forums and discussions.

The second part describes the methodological approaches that could be considered in order to explore and analyse intercultural communication issues in the framework of community interpreting. The focus is on case studies and the possibilities they offer through the combination of different methodologies. Since the objective of this paper is not to convey specific results but to serve as a point of departure for future research, the conclusions basically intend to reflect some of the key issues I believe should be taken into consideration when trying to link community interpreting research and intercultural communication theories.

2 Intercultural Communication Theories

For community interpreting research to consider feeding on intercultural communication theories, a wide literature revision is needed in order to detect the most appropriate theories to approach the object of our study. They may include interlanguage pragmatics, considered to be a field of study inside linguistics, as well as theories from social disciplines such as ethnography and social psychology, which show the specific patterns of interaction of different cultures. Thus, summarizing this literature revision and in order to draw the conceptual framework of the research project, the present paper will briefly expose some of the theories that have been proposed to describe communication between Chinese and Western cultures, as well as some reflections on their possible implications for community interpreting processes.

2.1 High and Low Context Communication

Hall (1977:91) defines "high-context communication" as a kind of communication in which "most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit part of the message", whereas 'low-context communication' is the opposite, as "the mass of information is vested in the explicit code". While 'low context' is often related to individualistic societies that emphasize the content of speech and focus on rules and on individual achievement (e.g. German, Scandinavian or American), 'high context' is frequently seen in collectivistic societies, which rely more on

non-verbal communication and focus on relationships (the so-called *guanxi*, 关系), group harmony and consensus (e.g. Chinese).

Bond (1991) also uses these concepts when describing communication strategies in the Chinese culture and when comparing them to Western cultures. According to him, 'high-context cultures' tend towards indirectness, in contrast to 'low-context cultures', which are much more explicit and direct. This presumption is also the basis of Gao and Ting-Toomey's (1998) comparative chart of the different patterns of communication between Chinese and North Americans. On the one hand, some of their examples reflect the differences between high and low context communication: for instance, while Chinese focus on *how* something is said, North Americans focus on *what* is said; Chinese value indirect talk and their requests are often implicit, whereas North Americans value direct talk and their requests are usually explicit. On the other hand, some other examples illustrate how collectivist and individualist societies work: if Chinese tend to keep their opinions to themselves it is because they try to avoid arguments and confrontation while promoting in-group harmony, whereas Americans like to express their opinions openly, not fearing debates.

Chinese indirectness can sometimes be noticed through expressions such as *kaolü kaolü* (考虑考虑, I'll think about it), *wenti bu da* (问题不大, it's not a big problem) or *yihou zaishuo* (以后再说, we'll talk about it later), which often hide a negative answer. However, it has even been described as 'saying yes for no and no for yes', as Ma (1996: 3) comments. Ma uses the concept 'contrary-to-face-value' communication to refer to "any kind of communication in which what is said is the opposite of, or different from, what the speaker believes to be true or what s/he is 'logically' expected to say" and points out that to East Asians, changing a 'yes' for a 'no' (or vice versa) depending on our expectation of the others' feelings, may help avoiding interpersonal confrontation and keep the communication channel open (Ma 1996). Thus, Ma suggests a typology of contrary-to-face-value messages based on two dimensions: first, on the internal motivation (other-serving or self-serving) and second, on the external speech (saying 'yes' for 'no' or 'no' for 'yes').

Bringing these theories to community interpreting research, it would be very interesting to analyse how interpreters manage to balance the different degrees of (in)directness of the cultures they are working with. How can an interpreter possibly know if, for instance, Chinese interlocutors are just being indirect to avoid a confrontation or are they really saying what they feel? Not only does this issue concern interpreters' ability to manage different communication patterns, but it also points to their role and functions and

raises the question of whether interpreters between distant cultures could take a more active role in assessing their interlocutors.

2.2 Pragmatics, Politeness and the Concept of “Face”

Indirectness is also described through the concept of ‘politeness’ (Brown/Levinson 1987). In the case of the Chinese, ‘politeness’ is tightly related to ‘face’: either reflected through *mianzi* (面子) or *lian* (脸), both terms frequently translated for ‘face’ even though they have slightly different connotations. According to Hu (1944:45), *mianzi* refers to “a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation”, whereas *lian* represents “the confidence of society in the integrity of the ego’s moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community”. Hu’s explanation has been widely referred to by other scholars, although many other theories have been developed to elucidate the great influence of ‘face’ in the Chinese culture.

Thus, politeness and face issues are also related to harmony, which may be regarded as one of the most respected values in Chinese society. Preserving one’s and others’ face is, therefore, a strategy to maintain harmony in social relations. For example, Hazen and Shi’s (2009) study provides a review of recent theoretical literature on the role of harmony, conflict and argument in Chinese society. Their approach places great importance on harmony, which is regarded as a keystone of relations in Chinese society.

Hwang’s (1987) model for explaining interpersonal behaviour patterns in Chinese society is also based on the concepts of ‘face’ (*mianzi*) and social relations (*guanxi*), but he adds two new concepts: *renqing* (人情) and *bao* (报). According to Hwang, *renqing* has three different meanings in Chinese culture: first, empathy or the ‘emotional responses of an individual confronting the various situations of daily life’ (ibid.:953); second, ‘a resource that an individual can present to another person as a gift in the course of social exchange’ (ibid.:954), also translated as ‘favour’; third, it also refers to a ‘set of social norms by which one has to abide in order to get along well with other people in Chinese society’ (ibid.:54). As for *bao*, it is often translated for ‘reciprocity’ or the act of repaying someone for a favour. Hwang advocates for the need of a model that reflects how Chinese really behave in social exchanges, since all the so-called ‘universal’ theories – such as the justice theory, based on the equity, equality and need rules (cf. Deutsch 1975; Leventhal 1976 cited in Hwang 1987:945) – fall short when trying to describe the specific case of the Chinese.

Other pragmatics theories include refusal and request strategies and reactions to compliments, all of them supporting the idea of Chinese ‘indirectness’. For instance, refusing (an invitation, an offer or a gift) has specific connotations in Chinese: on the one

hand, whereas because of modesty Chinese try to first refuse any kind of invitation, gift or offer, they are just forms of 'ritual refusing' (Yang 2008). On the other hand, there is the fear of 'losing face', since refusing something may make the person inviting or offering lose face. In these kinds of situations, the person refusing must find strategies to avoid making their interlocutor lose face, from providing excuses and reasons, to proposing alternatives (Yang 2008:1053). Nevertheless, being able to pragmatically adapt interlocutors' refusals certainly becomes a challenge to community interpreters.

Concerning request strategies, Dong (2008) analyses different ways of uttering requests among a sample of Chinese students and he points out a number of frequent strategies, such as providing some kind of justification to their request or making a compensatory promise. Even though Dong's main objective is to enhance the pragmatic competence of students of Chinese as a foreign language, this kind of analysis could also be applied to analyse interpreters' pragmatic competence and, for example, compare how Chinese native and non-native interpreters utter their interlocutors' requests.

Qu and Wang (2005) compare the reaction to compliments of a sample of Chinese students and a sample of North-American students. They conclude that one of the most common reactions amongst Chinese students (54.75%) is to refuse the compliment, as the expression *nali nali!* (哪里哪里!) reflects, literally meaning 'where? where?'. Meanwhile, North-American students tend to accept the compliments by just saying 'thanks'.

Lin (2008) studies how Chinese pragmatics are manifested in the oral expression of Chinese students of English, and points out that 'taboos' may be regarded as another kind of pragmatic interference. Lin (2008:45) refers to the example of a Chinese student who, talking to a North-American friend, asks him/her how much a certain object cost him/her, which was an unexpected question in this context and, therefore, made the North-American friend feel uneasy.

Another important aspect that may be taken into account is non-verbal communication. Even though most researchers agree on the importance of non-verbal communication, the truth is that it still is a relatively unexplored issue in community interpreting. In the case of interpreting for the Chinese, non-verbal communication could certainly offer a broad scope of study, since one of the features of 'high-context' communication cultures is that an important proportion of information is not verbalized, but transmitted in the non-verbal context. Yang (2007), for instance, analyses four specific non-verbal actions he detected in Mandarin Chinese speakers in their interpersonal communication: gaze, head nods, gentle smile and hand touch. Yang relies on the premise that non-verbal communication has a key role in collectivistic and high-context cultures

such as the Chinese, as it is used to indicate affiliation amongst interlocutors as well as their involvement in the conversation. According to Yang, affiliation is defined as a way of “displaying ‘sameness’ or solidarity with insiders rather than expression of distance or indifference”; therefore it is really important in collectivistic cultures, since each individual is considered to be related to the others and, as Yang points out, a conversation is “an interactive process in which they [the participants] establish mutual affiliation and strengthen connection”. Displaying participation in an interaction is, thus, very important. Yang advocates that non-verbal communication can provide more social meaning than verbal communication and, in addition, both kinds of communication overlap during the interaction. Yang makes a thorough in-depth analysis of the above-mentioned non-verbal actions, opening a very interesting field of study of direct application in community interpreting research.

Sales (2003) conducted the only study we have detected concerning Spanish and Chinese participants, departing from various mainstream hypotheses on intercultural communication with the Chinese: the fact that social relationship is established from the beginning of the interaction, the usual avoidance of personal topics, long silences between turns, scarce reactive tokens,³ scarce overlaps, low paralinguistic emphasis and no physical or eye contact, amongst others.⁴ This study was based on five videotaped interactions between Chinese migrants in Spain and Spanish subjects, who did not know each other before their participation in the research.

However, even though it is the only study we have detected that focuses on Spanish-Chinese interactions, some methodological aspects may question its validity. For instance, the sample of videotaped interactions was scarce, since only five conversations were analysed. It was also inappropriate as the Chinese participants had been living in Spain only for a short period of time (most of them not even one year) and, thus, had very limited linguistic competence in Spanish. This fact probably led to rather biased results, since some of the transcribed silences corresponding to the Chinese participants perhaps were due to a lack of understanding of their Spanish interlocutors’ messages, but not to the pragmatic function that silences would have if both interlocutors could at least understand the pragmatic information of each others’ messages.

³ According to Clancy, Thompson, Suzuki and Tao (1996, cited in Sales (2003:3)), a reactive token is ‘a short utterance produced by an interlocutor who is playing a listener’s role during the other interlocutor’s speakership’.

⁴ Sales’ (2003:1) hypothesis is based on Clancy et al. (1996); Raga y Sánchez (1999); Raga (in press); Ramsey (1984); Scollon and Scollon (1995); Young (1994).

Another factor that may have interfered in the development of conversations was that participants were not alone, but with recording assistants who even intervened in the interaction at certain stages. As readers of the transcriptions of the videotaped interactions, we feel that Chinese individuals were in a situation of inequality, since recording assistants also joined the Spanish participants when laughing about certain things that the Chinese might not have even understood. Therefore, we state that Sales' choice of the sample and methodology may have biased the results of a study that tried to evaluate intercultural communication problems, as problems emerged due to the Chinese participants' low linguistic competence in Spanish and inappropriate recording conditions.

All in all, intercultural communication research has been rather prolific and many studies have been developed with very different objectives. However, their influence in community interpreting research is still relatively low and very few authors have considered intercultural communication theories for their analysis. Rudvin (2007) is one of these few authors, pointing out that interpreters from collectivistic cultures may have a different attitude to those coming from individualistic cultures. For instance, Rudvin (2007:64) refers to Ytreland (2004) while citing the example of a business Chinese interpreter that manifested this kind of affiliation feeling that Yang (2007) describes in another article: "Interpreter D is a Chinese national, and she often finds herself in a dilemma as the Chinese tend to have a perception of the interpreter as an aid with the intent to assist her countrymen in reaching their goal in the negotiation" (Ytreland, 2004:48).

2.3 Further Considerations to the Previous Theories

As we have seen, most of the theories reviewed mainly describe intercultural communication with the Chinese through those concepts and values regarded as intrinsic to the Chinese society – e.g. collectivism, harmony, face and *guanxi*, among others. However, a critical revision of all these theories may reveal some aspects that some researchers have already denounced and that, perhaps, should be taken into consideration before applying them in further studies.

First, the scarcity of studies involving non Anglo-Saxon subjects shows an evident research gap in this field which can be the cause of biased conclusions. Most of the theories take the American, English or Australian models as a paradigm for 'Western', which may lead to the question of what the term 'Western' refers to. If it is to include, for instance, Mediterranean societies, intercultural communication theories should broaden their scope and include the specific patterns of behaviour of these societies, which may prove to be

closer to Chinese patterns of behaviour – in terms of face and reciprocity – than Anglo-Saxon societies.

Second and tightly related to this first consideration, there is the concern for the ‘Orientalism’ that has deeply influenced social sciences research in the era of Post-Colonialism. The term ‘Orientalism’ was proposed by Said (1978) in a homonymous work and, while mainly referring to the false assumptions underlying Western attitudes toward the Middle East, its implications have been expanded to all non-Western cultures. According to Said (1978:5), “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between *the Orient* and (most of the time) *the Occident*.” This “style of thought” has dominated any kind of production referring to *the Orient*, be it scientific, political, historical, artistic or philosophical and, according to Chung’s (2006:110) interpretation, “[t]he Orient is seen as separate, eccentric, backward, silently different, sensual and passive. [...] Its progress and value are judged in terms of, and in comparison to, the West, so it is always the Other, the conquerable, and the inferior”. Said’s Orientalism also revealed how the discourse of Orientalism had also been assumed and appropriated by the Orient itself, what Dirlik (1999) refers to as ‘Self-Orientalism’. In the field of intercultural communication and after reviewing the theories put forward by several researchers, the question of whether concepts such as ‘collectivism’ and ‘individualism’ or ‘high-context’ and ‘low-context’ communication cultures may just be products of the discourse of the Orientalism seems unavoidable. It may be interesting to take this issue with caution before starting any kind of research in intercultural communication in the field of community interpreting, since some of the results from empirical studies may help us shed light onto the controversial issue of whether previous theories are just but products of (Self)- Orientalism.

3 Linking Theories and Community Interpreting Research: the Example of a Case Study

3.1 Objectives and Research Questions

Conscious of the research gap concerning intercultural communication between Chinese and Spanish or Catalan communities and, by extension, conscious of how this kind of research could be applied to community interpreting, our paper intends to describe a methodological approach to explore the specificities of communication between these two cultures, as well as complementing already existing previous theories. Therefore, it is not its aim to elucidate specific results, but to propose methodological tools to evaluate to what extent some of the above-mentioned theories could be applied to the particular cultures that

will be observed in the planned project, i.e. Chinese and Spanish/Catalan. This paper is part of the work in progress of my own PhD dissertation; thus, results from the analysis still cannot be disclosed at this initial phase, but will be exposed in future publications.

A better understanding of Chinese-Spanish/Catalan intercultural communication patterns may help us revisit the question of the interpreters' role when they need to bridge communication gaps between such distant cultures. In this respect, it may be interesting to compare and contrast Chinese-Spanish/Catalan community interpreters' perception of their own work and of its specificities and challenges with our own observation of their actual performance. Moreover, in order to see to what extent 'practitioners' and 'theorists' share a same view of the profession, these two perceptions could also be complemented with the 'official' view displayed in institutional texts or by government representatives. We argue that providing a closer description of how interpreters actually need to deal with intercultural differences is mostly needed in the design of training courses for specific pairs of languages.

In summary, our research may also help to define the role of the interpreter when dealing with the primary speakers' different patterns of behaviour and communication; whether the concepts and values attributed to certain cultures are also evident in practice and how they become visible in the behaviour of the users of community interpreting; or even more specific topics, such as non-verbal communication issues and how community interpreters convey non-verbally transmitted information.

3.2 Methodological Approaches

Previous authors have advocated for the usefulness of ethnography in community interpreting research. For instance, Bahadır (2004) and Rudvin (2006) compare interpreters' activity with that of ethnographers, since they all spend some periods of time with the community they are studying. Creswell's (1998) introduction to qualitative inquiry may help us elucidate the implications of an ethnographic approach: he refers to Harris (1968) to define an ethnography as "a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system", where "the researcher examines the group's observable and learned patterns of behaviour, customs, and ways of life"(Harris 1968, cited in Creswell 1998:58). In this sense, it would respond to our need of examining 'patterns of behaviour', which intrinsically include 'patterns of communication' as a kind of behaviour. Even though ethnography was born in the context of cultural anthropology, it has now expanded to include "subtypes of ethnography with different theoretical orientations and aims" (Atkinson/Hammersley 1994, cited in Creswell 1998:58-59), which would also cover our

need to study a particular subgroup in the society: interpreters working between culturally distant communities. Data collection in ethnography relies mainly on participant observation and interviews (Creswell 1998:65), which, in our case, would mean participant observation in community interpreted interactions, as well as interviews with interpreters and, probably, users of interpreting. Through ethnography, we would be able to gather an *emic* perspective of community interpreting, i.e. how interpreters view themselves; and an *etic* perspective, i.e. our own interpretation as researchers about community interpreters. Furthermore, understanding both the *emic* and the *etic* perspective would contribute to a holistic view of our object of study, which is another of the principles of ethnography. Strictly following ethnography, though, would also imply some challenges, as Creswell (1998:61) points out, such as the extensive data collection time or the literary style of narratives which can sometimes limit the audience of our study.

Nevertheless, a case study may also prove to be an appropriate strategy if the aim of our study is not to make generalizations about a certain topic but to describe specific features of the particular case we want to approach. A considerable number of papers have been written on community interpreting in general, covering a relatively wide range of issues: from the interpreter's role to the specificities of the different fields that community interpreters cover (health service, legal settings, schools, etc.) and their working conditions, amongst other aspects. Similarly, as we have seen in the first section, many theories on intercultural communication with the Chinese have been put forward and theorists from different disciplines have attempted to describe a great variety of factors concerning Chinese communicative patterns. It is not our aim here to introduce new generalizations or to reinforce already existing ones, but to point out those specific features of the particular case we want to analyse, i.e. interpreting between Chinese and Spanish/Catalan communities in the context of Catalan public services. The combination of different sources of information typical of case studies may help us explore this specific issue in depth bearing in mind the different views of it. In this sense, even though ethnography also brings us numerous possibilities to approach how different members of the group we want to explore construct their particular vision of reality, in our research, we believe that the principles of a case study will help us better understand the specificities and roles of community interpreters between Chinese and Spanish/Catalan communities.

Creswell (1998:62) distinguishes between *intrinsic case studies* and *instrumental case studies*: the former focusing on a case that requires study due to its uniqueness, the latter being used to illustrate a specific issue. Considering the purpose of our research, an intrinsic case study might be more appropriate to approach the 'uniqueness', in terms of

Creswell, of interpreting between Chinese and Spanish/Catalan cultures. Still following Creswell's (1998:63) introduction to case studies, this author cites Yin (1989) to elucidate the distinction between the two analytical approaches in case studies: embedded and holistic. In an embedded analysis, "researchers select one analytical aspect of the case for representation", whereas in a holistic one, "researchers examine the entire case and present description, themes and interpretations or assertions related to the whole case" (Yin 1989, cited in Creswell 1998:250). Again, according to the objectives of our research, we are more interested in the holistic analysis, since we do not intend to focus on an analytical aspect (e.g. nonverbal communication), but to grasp the case as a whole, considering all the aspects that make it so specific.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

As was previously stated, the combination of different sources of information may be basic to reach the manifold approach that our objectives require. Even though other methods of data collection could be applied – Creswell (1998:63) mentions up to six different methods of data collection in case studies –, the study we are presenting, which is part of our own PhD dissertation as mentioned before, will be based on the following sources of information:

1. Official documents where community interpreters' profile is outlined, e.g. the Citizenship and Immigration Plan (2005-08) or the National Immigration Plan (2009), both issued by the Catalan Government (Generalitat de Catalunya 2006; 2008);
2. translated texts into Chinese for Chinese migrant communities, where information on Catalonia as well as on Public Services is provided;
3. transcriptions of interviews with community interpreters and with policy makers in charge of immigration management and, especially, in charge of the regulation of community interpreting;
4. field notes from participant observation of interactions between Public Services providers, interpreters and Chinese migrants;
5. transcriptions of audio-recorded interactions between Public Services providers, interpreters and Chinese migrants.⁵

Both the field notes from participant observation and the recordings will take place mainly at schools, in interactions between teachers, Chinese parents and interpreters. The topics

⁵ Despite our choice for transcriptions to represent the data of the recorded interactions, we are well aware of the fact that their representativity may be limited and that they may not be exempt of the subjective interpretation of the researcher when transcribing the data.

discussed in this kind of interactions do not often involve especially sensitive issues and, therefore, the presence of the researcher may not be felt as intrusive as it may be in other settings (e.g. hospitals).

All this specific data will be analysed in our dissertation through different methods, always considering the objectives we want to reach through our study. Table 1 summarizes how methods of data collection and of analysis are related to the specific objectives of our research.

Method of data collection	Method of analysis	Objective
Official documents where the community interpreters' profile is outlined.	Document analysis	Describe how community interpreters' profile is institutionally constructed.
Transcriptions of interviews to policy makers in charge of immigration management and, especially, of the regulation of community interpreting.	Discourse analysis	Explore government representatives' perception of community interpreting as a service to improve immigration management.
Translated texts into Chinese for Chinese migrant communities, where information on Catalonia as well as on Public Services is provided.	Document analysis	Analyse how Catalonia and its Public Service system is presented to migrant communities, either from the point of view of language and translation (how cultural references are transferred) from the point of view of the subjacent ideology.
Transcriptions of interviews with Chinese-Spanish/Catalan community interpreters.	Content and discourse analysis	Explore interpreters' own perception of their job and of the specificities and challenges that Chinese-Spanish/Catalan communication presents.
Field notes from participant observation of interactions between Public Services providers, interpreters and Chinese migrants.	Field notes analysis	Describe, in detail, the physical context where interactions take place, in order to better understand issues of non-verbal communication between such distant cultures, as well as working conditions for Chinese-Spanish/Catalan community interpreters and how they influence interpreted interactions.

Transcriptions of recorded interactions between Public Services providers, interpreters and Chinese migrants.	Conversation analysis	Analyse linguistic challenges of interpreting between Chinese-Spanish/Catalan, especially focusing on cultural references transference and other pragmatic issues.
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Table 1: Relation between methods of data collection, methods of analysis and objectives of each analysis

Through the analysis of the different kinds of data, thus, we will be able to extract different kinds of results that will help us provide a more detailed description of Chinese-Spanish/Catalan community interpreting. For instance, through the analysis of official documents and through the interviews with policy makers, we aim at reaching a very similar objective: the description of how the community interpreters' profile is 'officially' or 'institutionally' constructed and viewed. Through the analysis of translated texts for Chinese migrant communities we will also grasp an official view, but in this case in relation to how Catalonia is presented to migrant communities. On the other hand, the analysis of interviews with interpreters themselves will help us better understand their perceptions of their profession as well as the challenges that interpreting between such distant cultures poses to them. Participant observation and conversation analysis will let us analyse through our own lenses how interpretation is performed and how cultural differences are managed in real encounters.

3.4 *Triangulation of Information*

Triangulation of ideas or information is a generic term used in qualitative research in order to overcome the weaknesses of using just one method in a research. Denzin (1970) suggests that this technique can take on different shapes: methodological triangulation (when more than one method is used), theoretical triangulation (when various theoretical perspectives are used), data triangulation (when data from different sources is gathered) and investigator triangulation (when various investigators gather and interpret the data in one field).

In our case study, methodological triangulation will be used not only to validate information gathered through different methods, but also to present a view of community interpreting for the Chinese globally. The following table (table 2) resumes just some specific questions that we intend to answer through triangulation of methods. For instance, on the one hand, we are very interested in the triangulation of information related to Chinese-Spanish or Catalan community interpreters' role and profile, since it will provide a broader image of how it is constructed and developed both in theory and in practice. On the other hand, one of the main research questions of our dissertation – i.e. how interpreters

overcome intercultural communication challenges when dealing with distant cultures such as the Chinese-Spanish or Catalan – will mainly be explained through the triangulation of participant observation, conversation analysis and interviews with interpreters.⁶ However, being able to compare and complete this information with data from documents such as translated texts for Chinese migrants will be a must if we want to attain a global vision of how information about Catalonia is conveyed and presented in written and oral Chinese in terms of terminology, cultural references transference and interlanguage pragmatics.

Question	Methodological triangulation
Does the interpreters' actual performance coincide with their own perception of themselves?	Participant observation + conversation analysis of recorded interactions + interviews with interpreters
How do interpreters overcome the challenges that intercultural communication between distant cultures such as the Chinese-Spanish/Catalan poses?	Participant observation + conversation analysis of recorded interactions + interviews with interpreters
How do contextual factors (public services settings, power relations, etc.) affect the development of interpreted interactions?	Participant observation + conversation analysis of recorded interactions + interviews with interpreters
Do interpreters' views on their own profile coincide with the "official" view?	Interviews with interpreters + interviews with government representatives + document analysis of official texts
Do interpreters' references of Catalonia and Catalan public services (when actually interpreting) coincide with the perception that translated documents for migrant communities intend to convey?	Interviews with interpreters + interviews with policy makers + conversation analysis of recorded interactions + document analysis of translated texts for migrant communities
Is there a uniform terminology concerning Catalan cultural references?	Interviews with interpreters + conversation analysis of recorded interactions + document analysis of translated texts for migrant communities

Table 2: Methodological triangulation as a means to approach different research questions

In sum, comparing and complementing different kinds of information, methodological triangulation will undoubtedly help us reach a holistic approach to community interpreting with the Chinese.

⁶ The results of this research will be disclosed in a PhD Dissertation – as mentioned before; as well as in future publications.

4 Linking Theory, Research and Training

Even though this paper is not presenting definite results but a prospective overview of how research linking intercultural communication theories and community interpreting could be conducted, it should also be pointed out that most of the considerations presented hereby could also be applied in training courses for community interpreters. For instance, all the theories exposed in the first part could be used as food for thought at class, especially if we bear in mind that students taking community interpreting courses very often come from a great variety of countries. In our case, we could encourage Chinese students to actively take part in discussions around intercultural communication topics, contrasting their opinions and views with those of other students. We are all well aware that cultural knowledge is almost as important as linguistic knowledge and, in this respect, students may take their own experience – some of them may even have experience as ‘natural interpreters’ for their relatives and friends – as a basis to question or confirm the constructs proposed by theoretical approaches to intercultural communication. All in all, theory may help trainers raise awareness and criticism and may serve as a stimulus for debates and reflection amongst those taking part in community interpreting courses, either at university level or at other kinds of courses.

As for the second part of our paper, the results obtained from the research methodology exposed may also be used in more practical sessions or even orientation workshops. Just to mention a possible application, it may be useful for community interpreters to know the origins and precedents of their professional profile, how it is stated in official documents and how policy makers understand it. Only if interpreters can contrast their daily work with the ‘official’ view, will they be able to claim for their rights and even engage in professional associations to make this claim more visible. In this sense, we believe that training must be the channel to spread all the recommendations researchers increasingly put forward.

5 Conclusion

Summing up, the main goal of the present paper is to point out the existing gap between intercultural communication theories and community interpreting research. In the first part, trying to link both fields, we have explained some relevant theories in the field of intercultural communication with the Chinese, while also raising some issues that could be considered both in research and also as stimulus for discussions and debates in training courses. In the second part, our paper presents the specific example of the methodology that will be applied in a case study focusing on Chinese-Spanish/Catalan intercultural

communication issues in community interpreting encounters. We advocate for the usefulness of the manifold approach of case studies which, by means of different sources of data, may help us get a broader perspective of the particular issue we are exploring. The methodological tools our paper presents try to shed light onto those aspects that may be especially useful in this kind of multidisciplinary research: methods of data collection, methods of analysis and triangulation of information.

All in all, our paper does not intend to convey specific results but to pinpoint some theoretical and methodological issues that could be taken into account in the study of community interpreting from new perspectives, especially in the case of distant cultures such as the Chinese and the Spanish/Catalan.

6 References

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