
INTERVIEW WITH ANN CORSELLIS, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF LINGUISTS

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A. C. I look forward to doing my best to answer your questions. It might be sensible to mention at the outset that many of the topics I know you are interested in have not yet benefitted from extensive qualitative or quantitative academic research. So my answers will be mainly based on development experience. I hope that we can also look to the future and think about what interpreters and translators might do to build their own professional frameworks to achieve the status, structures and standards they want and need. There is a real concern that, if interpreters and translators don't do that for themselves, someone else will do it to them and get it very wrong. There will need to be collaborations between academia and the profession to support the journey, not only in applied linguistics but also in such areas as social and language policy. It is going to be interesting.

C.V.G. How would you define/ describe *Public Service Interpreting and Translation*?

A. C. I would describe it as interpreting and translating where providers and recipients of public services do not share a common language to a degree where accurate and reliable communication can take place.

PSITs transfer the meaning of what is said, or written, in a source language into a target language; both ways and without adding or omitting anything. They thereby respect the need

for both their clients, the public service provider and recipient, to retain control and responsibility for what is said

“Public” services may be defined differently in different cultures. I would define them as services that are normally provided by central or local government, and supported in whole or part by national or local taxes. These include legal, medical and social services. The last include such areas as education welfare, social housing and environmental health.

C.V.G. What do you think about the different names used (community interpreting, PSIT, intercultural mediation...)?

A. C. Linguists, above all, appreciate that the same term can convey different meanings in different cultures. I liked the term “community” interpreting, which we used originally in the UK, in the same way as the much respected Australians and others do. However, here that became confused with the European Community (as it then was) and people thought it referred only to the official languages member states. Secondly, and more worryingly, “community” interpreting became associated with lower standards of training and assessment (if any) and with a less defined role where, for example, the interpreter might take on additional roles, advocate for one “side” or the other, give personal advice or opinion and not be impartial.

The title Public Service interpreting was a substitute, intended to convey the concept of an individual who had been properly trained and assessed for the task. A RPSI is a public service interpreter who is registered with their national independent regulatory body, according to clear and transparent criteria and has agreed to be subject to its code of conduct and its associated disciplinary procedures where a breach of that code is alleged (UK example for PSIs www.nrpsi.co.uk)

Intercultural mediation could mean different things in different contexts and is therefore something to be wary of unless one knows precisely what is intended. At one end of the scale are third parties who “explain” the “culture” of one interlocutor to another. Apart from finding it patronizing and impertinent, I defy another English person to explain my “culture” accurately. Any attempt to do so is likely to end in failure. I would much rather be asked, through an interpreter, to describe my own my needs, attitudes, perceptions and so forth. If, through circumstances, I am confused or incoherent that is important information for, say, a doctor or police officer, who should be trained to ask the right questions and appreciate the answers. Equally, the doctor or the police officer is in the best position to explain their own service and their role in it in particular situations. (NB There is a parallel training to prepare public service providers on how to work with PSITs and across cultures. what refs do you want? E.g. www.buildingmutualtrust.eu videos). At the other end of the scale are the acceptable strategies used by PSITs to transfer meaning accurately, using their knowledge of the cultures that underpin their languages.

C.V.G. How do you feel about including in PSIT aspects of medical, legal, administrative , educative T&I? And the different fields? And what about including translation and not only interpreting? Is it necessary?

A. C. *One of the distinctive features of PSIT is the fact that there is rarely time to carry out prior research for an assignment. Dealing with this aspect is a central part of their training and assessment at all levels. One cannot expect women in labour, detainees in police cells, patients in Accident & Emergency Departments or people involved in ding dong neighbourhood and domestic disputes to wait around for interpreters to look up the structure, procedures, processes and terminology of each public service. Therefore such background information must be known in advance, kept up to date and be accompanied by the necessary information retrieval skills which enable any swift additions to cope with anything out of the ordinary.*

Currently, training and assessment are often carried out sector by sector as a pragmatic solution to enable carefully selected students to cover what is needed in affordable part-time courses over an academic year. In the long-term the option of full time courses, covering all the sectors, might be considered if funding is available.

It should be mentioned that all sectors, and obviously all languages, should be treated equally and to the same standard. I have occasionally heard it said that legal interpreting is the most difficult. That is not true in my experience. Legal interpreting may have progressed the furthest because we started there but medical and social interpreting are equally demanding in their different ways.

To answer your question about translation, I have rarely come across a public service event which did not include a written text of some sort, which requires oral or written translation. Just because those texts are often short does not mean they are unimportant. Consent to surgery forms, parking tickets, housing application forms, school reports and letters from mother are crucial. So I think that PSIs should be able to deal, accurately and responsibly, with such texts as they may come across, in both their languages, in the normal course of events. It would anyway be impractical to pause matters while a professional translator was sought and commissioned, to deal with such texts, within a tight time-scale. However, PSIs should also abide by the item in their code about declaration of professional limitations, (know and admit when you don't know) and request that on any text they judge to be beyond their qualifications and competence is passed on to a qualified specialist translator. Public service staff should be aware of this and seek the PSIs advice in time to locate, if needed, a suitable translator where there are deadlines to be observed. This requirement for declaration of limitations is shared by other professions and there is no shame in doing so. Ballistics, medical and forensic reports or complex legal texts may be examples of when this might happen for reasons of content. Where the target language is the PSIs second language, some may prefer to hand a text on to a translator who is a native speaker of that language to achieve potentially added style and elegance, especially where the text is for publication.

C.V.G. You know that there is a committee working on ISO standards for Community Interpreting/PSI. Do you think this is a further and necessary step? How can this help to the professionalization of PSIT?

A. C. *It might help if we started with the definition of a profession from the recommendations of the first EU Project on legal interpreting, which were accepted by the Commission.*

“A profession is defined as a group of people who share a common expertise and profess to a code of ethics and conduct, which is in the interests of their clients, colleagues and body of knowledge and which goes beyond the self-interest of the individual practitioner.

Professions come into being where trust is required, primarily because the clients are not in a position to judge for themselves the quality of service being given at the point of delivery. Doctors are an example. Likewise, by definition, clients cannot judge for themselves the quality of work of interpreters and translators because the clients do not speak both the languages in question.

In order to fulfil what is required of them by their professional code, professions establish:

- *Selection criteria (for entry to training and then the professional register)*
- *Initial and in-service training*
- *Recognised assessments at all levels*
- *Guidelines to good practice*
- *Disciplinary procedures.*

All five of the above should be:

- *Transparent*
- *Nationally/internationally recognised*
- *Consistent*
- *Accountable to the public and the profession.”*

(Extract from chapter 7, written by A. Corsellis and Leandro Felix Fernandez, in Aequitas: Access to justice across language and culture in the EU. Ed. Hertog. 2001 pub. Lessius Hogeschool, Antwerpen)

The principle of consistency is a very worthwhile one. How that could be implemented in practice is another matter. While I know of the existence of the ISO committee, I confess I don't know much else about it. I assume that the committee mainly comprises experienced public service interpreters, liaises with other professional stake holders and takes account of other relevant existing and current work e.g. the project on assessments led by Alicante University (www.qualitas-project.eu) and any existing national standards such as the National occupational interpreting standards in <http://www.cfu.uk.com>

C.V.G. What can you say about the evolution of PSIT since 1995 when the first Critical Link conference took place?

A. C. The first Critical Link conference was a seminal and joyous moment when those of us who had been struggling to lay PSIT foundations in our own countries met for the first time. The delegates included working PSITs from all over the world, some representatives from the public services and a proportion of academics. The CL conferences have gradually changed in their nature since then, and now delegates are mainly academics, but they continue to make a useful contribution.

In general terms, this reflects what has happened since 1995. There are two necessary, and interdependent, arms to professional evolution: academia and practice. For example, the interpreters that academics train need professional structures to work in once qualified; the academics need an evolving development of interpreting practice to support through meaningful research and training.

Academia has developed and disseminated those aspects which belong in universities and include:

- *selection and training of PSIT students*
- *research.*

The practical implementation of PSIT has not developed correspondingly. The Country Profiles, on the Qualitas web-site (www.qualitas-project.eu), are instructive in terms of EU member states and the range of achievements may reflect what is happening in non-EU countries. We might talk about what interpreters, as a profession might do, later.

C.V.G. Do you think the current economic crisis has had (is having) an impact on the professionalization of the PSIT ? Why?

A. C. My own view is that the economic crisis is an excuse not a reason. Common sense tells one that getting it right will be likely, in the long term, to be more cost effective than getting it consistently wrong.

Lack of commitment, a proper understanding of the topic, priorities and short-termism on the part of the decision makers would contribute to an impasse.

C.V.G. How far are we from reaching professionalization in PSIT in a common European context? Which steps have been taken? Which steps should be taken?

A. C. The first step is always to know what you want to do. That has been done in the main, through the series of EU projects and national developments. Examples of good practice have been developed and recorded, as a foundation for further development in the light of experience & taking account of national systems, including the following:

- *selection of PSIT students*
- *initial and on-going training*
- *assessments*
- *registration*
- *code of conduct and disciplinary procedures*
- *good practice guidelines*
- *training of trainers*
- *sample, freely downloadable teaching materials*
- *in-service training for public service staff.*

It is now a matter of joining up the dots, which may be easier said than done. I would suggest that that requires three, and possibly four, national independent but interdependent enabling structures (with a degree of international consistency):

- *a recognized examinations body*
- *a membership body*
- *a regulatory register*
- *a trades union – e.g. to negotiate fees, support individuals in conflict with employers, promote health and safety strategies.*

Only interpreters can create these structures for themselves. Interpreters are too important (and I can say this because I am not an interpreter) to be without a protective enabling structure. A good number of member states have some, or all, such bodies and many more have good starting points.

I confess now to my worst nightmare, which may be unlikely but that is what nightmares are made of, whereby an interpreter has very powerful pressures put on him or her to break their code of conduct, or encounters other difficulties, and has no one to turn to.

C.V.G. What do you consider would be the most appropriate measures to regularize the situation of the translator / interpreter in public services?

A. C. I think you might have to aim at statutory regulation and protection of title. I used to wonder whether this would be too much but now, in the UK any way, we have seen the damage that can be done without the highest levels of protection, which cannot be totally subject to political whim.

Presumably, there would need to be a critical mass of qualified, registered interpreters for statutory regulation to be put in place. There would be no point in legislating that only people with specified skills and experience could be engaged, when there were not enough of them. It might be possible to motivate interpreters by saying, for example, in five years' time this legislation will be enacted. All that depends, of course, on being able to persuade the legislators to do it.

I suggest the other useful thing, that would then be worth looking at, is the EU Professional Card for, by definition, interpreters could benefit from freedom of movement across member states.

All this relates to other pan European developments. One is the thoughts of e-justice about an EU register. I am doubtful in that I find just a national register tough to garden nicely and would prefer national registers of equivalent standards, which can be accessed from other member states. Another is the increasing use of remote interpreting. Has the profession given thought to what might happen for example, if a PSIT is alleged to have breached their code when working across national frontiers? Whose disciplinary procedures apply?

C.V.G. Do you think the future of PSIT is conditioned by the inclusion of this area in recent technological advances? how can these affect (or are affecting) PSIT development?

A. C. PSIT will certainly be affected to some extent by the use of technology. It seems to me that remote interpreting, in any form, requires a very solid standard of interpreting skills, combined with the additional specific skills needed for using the medium. Where those skills are not in place, deficiencies may be revealed on the large screens seen by a number of people, some of whom may speak both languages. The standard of skills should obviously be subject to international equivalencies when working across national borders.

At the same time, public services are desperate to save money and time and many see technology as an all- purpose solution – which, of course, it is not. There is therefore a tension between whether the supply of the right standards of interpreting and other skills can consistently meet the demand of technology. The reports of the AVIDICUS projects are instructive (www.videoconference-interpreting.net/AVIDICUS.html) . It includes what is needed in the five relevant skills sets for:

- *Interpreting*
- *IT*
- *Public service staff*
- *Members of the public*
- *administration .*

Technology may, at times, be helpful in maintaining standards and accountability. For example, tape recording of police interviews, which then happened to include interpreted interviews, was introduced in the UK. A copy of the tape is provided for both prosecution and defence, while the master copy is locked away. There are some inevitable challenges about interpreting. We should all, whatever our profession, be accountable.

C.V.G. Training programmes of different duration and kinds about topics related to PSIT are increasing. Do you think the same tendency is given in the job market? Do the graduate students find job opportunities? What do you think it should be done?.

A. C. The crux of the matter here is that PSIT standards and skills should be identified. Public services and members of the public should be informed and warned that anything less would be unacceptable and unreliable.

Professional training courses aim beyond examinations, to produce competence in the work place. Their value can only be judged by whether they do that, whether those courses are offered at universities or in other educational establishments. No one can be “nearly” a brain surgeon or “nearly” an interpreter. In the incremental process of skills development, there may be an initial professional first degree level (minimum standard) and higher levels. There may also be courses, which add to the core foundation, in specialisms and other related topics.

To keep ahead of the curve, there may be a conversation to be had soon about the relationship between the academic and professional practice training and assessments. Law and medicine separate them out, while taking care to ensure cohesion. Their degree courses are accredited by the professions.

C.V.G. What is your opinion about funding and management of PSIT providers? Should it be in hands of the public institution or private companies?

A. C. There has to be clarity about the difference between professions and commerce. In broad terms, professions (see Q4) collectively aim to meet what is required of them by their ethical codes, and are underpinned by rigorous financial stewardship. Commerce, in reverse, aims to make a profit and should be underpinned by ethical approaches.

Both are subject to the law and are perfectly proper in their place. But they cannot be confused. Members of professions, such as law and medicine, in private practice will primarily owe allegiance to their codes, which will offer guidance as to their maintaining integrity and good practice, supported by disciplinary procedures where there are allegations of any breach of those codes. I would suggest that the same applies to PSITs.

What type of organisation administers PSITs depends on what works best for all of those involved. Whatever it is must, inter alia:

- *Enable PSITs to meet the requirements of their professional codes*
- *Provide the best possible service to their clients*
- *Ensure that PSITs receive acceptable fees and working conditions. It will be noted that less money will be available where commercial companies are making a profit for their share- holders.*

I am increasingly coming to the conclusion that a third option should be considered: regional not-for-profit cooperatives, working under national guidelines to good practice to promote quality and consistency. Their core functions could be to:

- *administer a 24/7 contact system*
- *support, mentor and supervise*
- *promote training to nationally recognized standards in local colleges*
- *promote Continuous Professional Development for both PSITs and public service personnel*
- *collect data regarding present and potential demand, as a basis for planning*
- *liaise with local education establishments*
- *liaise with local speech communities*
- *liaise with local public services*
- *liaise with other regional units to promote national cover e.g. for rarer languages and compatible IT systems, programmes and procedures*
- *liaise with local and national professional bodies.*

There are two relevant points. The first is the there are a number of competent interpreters who would be capable of running such regional units and supervising a small administrative staff, possibly in rotation with colleagues and after suitable induction training (see below). Secondly, there is a lot of healing, team building and development to be done and interpreters themselves can be best placed to lead and nurture that.

Some not-for-profit units have been funded through service level agreements with local public services, whereby they are given an annual budget which they invoice per assignment for accountability. The unit would also give advance notice to the service if it looks as though the budget might be over taken by demand.

C.V.G. What types of training programs do you think it will provide the necessary management skills to work in these areas? Do you recommend any?

A. C. I sometimes wonder whether matters do not progress because managers do not know where to start. May be the concept of trained managers being able to manage anything is waning. I hope so because the first principle of management is to enable others to succeed, and that includes the managers themselves. Relevant management training, to enable individuals to plan, organize and implement the delivery of equal and effective services to multi-lingual, multi-cultural constituencies could easily be made available at different levels and for different purposes. Assessments could be developed accordingly and might include not only formal examinations but also portfolios and practical tasks.

It should be possible to introduce an optional module in MPA (masters in public administration) courses, and especially the EU MPAs, for civil servants and decision makers at one end of the scale, and at lower levels for others, to enable them to acquire the necessary skills to carry out among other things:

a) Market research

To identify, record and utilise relevant information about the client group in terms of: the languages spoken, the cultural and social backgrounds, needs, attitudes and perceptions

b) Inform

To inform their client group about their services in ways that are accessible and appropriate e.g. what the service does, qualifications of staff, how to reach them

c) Plan necessary staffing

Based on a proper understanding of their role and qualifications - to select, employ, deploy and support staff with the necessary additional skills including: interpreters, translators, bilingual professionals e.g. bilingual lawyers or receptionists

d) Quality assurance

To monitor and evaluate staff performance and maintain quality assurance strategies for service delivery that takes into account the views of clients and staff

e) Manage incremental change and development in this field

To plan realistically, develop the skills and structures needed, and to co-ordinate their implementation over a reasonable time-scale

f) Budget

To acquire, manage and safeguard the necessary budgets for the tasks

g) Collaborate

To collaborate with other bodies to produce a national/international, cross sectoral and inter-disciplinary consistency.

(based on a paper first given at Heriott Watt University in 2005)

C.V.G. Do you agree with Prunč's comment that PSIT has turned from the former *Cinderella* of Interpreting Studies into a quite respectable sister of Conference Interpreting?

A. C. Depends what one means by "quite"; see answer to Q2 above. In the US I believe "quite" means "very", while in England it means getting on for the opposite. The American who described my renowned steak and kidney pie as "quite nice" received a very frosty response and no pudding, until I was given a translation.

Certainly, both conference and PSIT interpreting deserve equal respect. Both demand equal standards of excellence. The fact that it isn't yet always available for the latter is another matter. I am convinced it will be eventually, because there is no alternative, but not next week.

They require, however, different skills sets. This was made clear by a group of conference interpreters at a seminar in Paris. Conference interpreters usually interpret, with high levels of style and elegance:

- *one way i.e. into one language*
- *simultaneously*
- *from booths, with headphones*
- *in 20 minute shifts*
- *in teams*
- *with opportunities to research the topic in advance*
- *with defined agreements on fee scales and working arrangements.*

This skills set is inappropriate to most public service/community situations, except perhaps for the international courts where there are interpreting booths.

PSITs usually work, sometimes with less style and elegance but with equal accuracy:

- *both ways i.e. into both their working languages*
- *either in short consecutive or whispered simultaneous*
- *(except for rare occasions when portable booths and associated IT are provided)*
- *wherever they are needed; from the hard shoulder of the motorway to hospital wards and lawyers' offices*
- *for as long as the event lasts – albeit with breaks if possible*
- *on their own*
- *without always much chance for advance preparation*
- *often without expectation of reasonable fees and working arrangements.*

It is this last point in particular that provides the Cinderella comparison. This can lock PSITs into a negative cycle, whereby poor fees cannot attract the best linguists to train; so unqualified and poor interpreters are often engaged and cannot attract better fees. It is a tribute to the generous professionalism of qualified PSITs who are practicing that any progress is made.

If anyone deserves to go to the ball, they do.

C.V.G. Do you have any other recommendations for people interested in training in this area?

A. C. Be realistic and aware that full, or even part-time, work cannot be guaranteed, simply because no one can predict who is going to be arrested or taken to hospital and which language will be involved. Many PSITs have “portfolio careers”, which comprise a number of areas of work. This provides a flexibility and range of interests.

This is a newly emerging branch of the profession and you may have a hand in building it. It can give you the privilege of playing at the very top of your game.

Enjoy it!