OBSERVING BRIEFLY TRAINED, NON-CERTIFIED INTERPRETERS AT WORK: RISK ANALYSIS / LA OBSERVACIÓN DE INTÉRPRETES NO CERTIFICADOS TRAS UNA FORMACIÓN DE CORTA DURACIÓN: ANÁLISIS DE RIESGOS

July De Wilde

Ghent University
July.DeWilde@ugent.be

Ella van Hest

Ghent University
Ella.vanHest@ugent.be

Pascal Rillof

Flemish Government Integration Agency
pascal.rillof@integratie-inburgering.be

Lies Van Poucke
Flemish Government Integration Agency
lies.vanpoucke@integratie-inburgering.be

Abstract: The exceptional migratory flows in Europe in 2015-2016 have entailed several challenges for the Flemish public service interpreting sector, including a mismatch in supply and demand, a shortage of interpreters for lesser-used language varieties, and government budget constraints. To meet these challenges head-on, the Flemish Government Integration Agency, responsible for certifying public service interpreters, has set up a research project designed to determine whether, and under what circumstances, briefly trained volunteer "language assistants" (LAs) could offer a valid additional form of language mediation. First, participants were trained and evaluated when interacting, mainly through role play, with fellow trainees. Second, their interpreting performances during real-life service provision interactions were video-recorded and assessed. The LAs' interpreting performances were assessed predominantly as unsatisfactory, the main challenges being linked to accuracy, language proficiency and code of conduct adherence. These findings have been addressed in a follow-up project by increasing the required CEFR level of Dutch, and by changing the content of the training.

Keywords: public service interpreting, assessment, non-certified interpreters

Resumen: Los flujos migratorios excepcionales en la Europa de 2015-2016 han supuesto dificultades para el sector de la interpretación en servicios públicos en Flandes, como desajustes en la oferta y demanda, falta de intérpretes para lenguas de menor difusión y recortes presupuestarios.

Para hacer frente a dichas dificultades, la Agencia de Integración del Gobierno flamenco, responsable de la certificación de intérpretes en servicios públicos, ha iniciado un proyecto de investigación que determine si, y en qué circunstancias, los "asistentes de lengua" (AL) con formación de corta duración constituirían una forma adicional de mediación lingüística. Primero se formó y evaluó a los AL, principalmente a través de interacciones con compañeros de formación en juegos de rol, para pasar, en un segundo tiempo, a evaluarlos durante prestaciones reales grabadas en vídeo. Sus prestaciones fueron evaluadas en su mayoría como insuficientes debido sobre todo a la falta de suficiente competencia de interpretación, competencia lingüística y adherencia al código deontológico. En el proyecto de seguimiento se elevó por tanto el nivel de neerlandés inicial requerido y se adaptó el contenido de la formación.

Keywords: interpretación en servicios públicos, evaluación, intérpretes no certificados

1. Introduction

In Flanders, the Dutch-speaking northern region of Belgium, the Public Service Interpreting and Translation (PSIT) sector is organised and institutionalised relatively well (Štefková & Bossaert, 2019). However, due to the exceptional migratory flows in Europe in 2015-2016, we have seen an increase and change in the demand of PSIT. Flanders' recent immigration flows have been in step with the trends of other European countries. A gradual increase in the number of asylum applications between 2008 and 2012 was followed by a more rapid annual pace, culminating in around 1.3 million asylum seekers in 2015. In 2016, the number of asylum applications levelled off at around 1.2 million (2020b). Whereas the numbers of asylum applications decreased significantly in 2017-2018, 2019 saw a new increase of 11.2% (676,300 first-time and repeat asylum applications Eurostat, 2020b). The most recent report available anticipates a drop in 2020, due to COVID-19-related movement restrictions and border closures (Eurostat, 2020a).

These exceptional flows have presented the Flemish PSIT sector with several challenges. These challenges, which have been echoed in other European countries (e.g. Bergunde & Pöllabauer, 2019, Čemerin, 2019), relate mainly to mismatches in supply and demand and to shortages in trained interpreters for the rarer languages. Calculations based on the yearly reports show that, between 2015-2019, the main PSIT provider in Flanders was unable to meet the demand for public service interpreters and translators in, on average, 23.4% of the cases. Arabic, Dari, Pashto and Somali occurred most frequently on the lists of languages for which no interpreters or translators were available (Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering, 2016, 2017a, 2018, 2019, 2020).

Challenges facing the PSIT sector also stem from the broader language-ideological political background against which Flemish PSIT services currently operate. These challenges are related to policy choices and budgetary restrictions. Two recent changes in integration policy reflect more stringent attitudes towards migrants' level of commitment in the host society, in particular with regard to their knowledge of Dutch. First, the required level for Dutch included in the civic integration course, which is compulsory for non-EU migrants, was raised from a CEFR A1 level to an A2 level. Second, since 29 January 2016, participants have been required to pass a Dutch language test, whereas previously they only had to commit to making an effort (Noppe et al., 2018). The emphasis on Dutch language knowledge was reflected in budgetary choices as well. As can be deduced from files from the Belgian Court of Audit (Rekenhof, 2020), additional funds were invested primarily in integration trajectories rather than expanding the available pool of interpreters and, thereby, meeting the shortage of interpreters.

The current Flemish government (2019-2024) added another restriction, which is likely to affect the PSIT sector even more directly: time restrictions will be imposed on the access to

free PSIT services for migrant populations included in the civic integration programme. This means that, upon completion of the integration programme, people in need of interpreting services are required to pay them out of their own pockets (Vlaamse Regering, 2019, p. 145). This decision adds to other budget reallocations that have been implemented since January 2020 for public service providers relying on PSIT interventions for adequate public service provision. Stakeholders have warned against the risk of exclusion and further proliferation of ad hoc language-support solutions that can seriously compromise the quality of communication during public service provision (Martin, 2020; Poppelmonde, 2019).

On the demand side, local facilities urge the Flemish Government Integration Agency – who are not only responsible for migrants' integration trajectories but also for the training and certifying of public service interpreters – to rapidly increase the capacity of certified public service interpreters, or to provide an alternative offer of interpreters or language assistants. In Flanders, access to language assistance is regulated through the Decree of 7 June 2013 on the Flemish Integration and Civic Integration Policy, which stipulates that "social interpreting and translation are provided by interpreters and translators included in the Flemish register for social interpreters and social translators, […] the central database of certified social interpreters and social translators, managed by the [Flemish Government Integration Agency]" (Decree Flemish Integration, Art. 41, 3°, our translation). While the Integration Agency is responsible for the certification and supply of certified interpreters, local facilities offering public services depend on other public bodies for funding interpreting services. However, local facilities are obliged to work with certified interpreters whenever available: "the use of other interpreters and translators is only permitted if no interpreter or translator is available in the Flemish register of social interpreters and social translators for the interpretation or translation request." (Decree Flemish Integration, Art. 41, 3°, our translation). Despite being legally regulated, in practice, and partly in response to shortages of certified interpreters for specific language combinations and restricted budgets for increasing language demands to be covered, some local facilities have set up their own initiatives with volunteers, without any form of quality control whatsoever (see for instance the city of Mechelen, Van Haezendonck, 2017).

Faced with these challenges, the Integration Agency has set up a research project intended to train, coach and assess volunteers, some of whom – a minority – are already working as informal interpreters or "language assistants" (LAs henceforth) without being certified. In doing so, the Integration Agency aims to determine whether, and under what circumstances, these briefly trained LAs could offer a valid additional form of language mediation (for the full project report in Dutch see Rillof et al., 2020).

In the next section we will provide information on the brief training for LAs organised by the Integration Agency. In section three, we will discuss central issues related to codes of ethics, roles, non-professional interpreting and accuracy. In sections four and five we detail the methodology applied for the assessment of the LAs and the main findings. The last section points out how the recommendations of the project have been addressed in a follow-up project, which ran from January to December 2020.

2. Background: Training LAs

Staff members of the Integration Agency, including authors 3 and 4, designed a training programme and recruited interested volunteers through project partners in local public administrations, more specifically the integration and diversity offices of the participating cities. After a general information session on the profession of public service interpreting and the project aims, each candidate took an admission test to assess whether they had a CEFR B2 level of Dutch. Knowledge of the other language was not externally assessed, but self-reported by the candidates. All candidates, including those who had not yet attained the B2 level for

Dutch, were admitted to the two-day training. Participants were taught the basics of public service interpreting and familiarised with the code of conduct (COC henceforth) for public service interpreters in Flanders. In line with current interpreting pedagogy (González-Davies & Enríquez-Raído, 2016), the training was grounded in experiential and situated learning, offering trainees practice in the safe surroundings of the classroom, mainly through role play using authentic scenarios and problem solving strategies (Wadensjö, 2014, Angelelli, 2017). Training was mostly non-language-specific: generic training modules on interpreters' ethics, interpreting techniques and contextual knowledge were in Dutch. Whenever possible, participants were matched on the criteria of language background for the role play activities, so that they were able to provide mutual feedback in their working languages. In the absence of a language partner, role play was conducted solely in Dutch, instead of Dutch and one foreign language as would be the case in authentic interpreting contexts. Although the trainers covered a variety of foreign languages, no language-specific trainers were available for Farsi, Somali and Kurdish. A total of 14 training sessions were organised, involving 84 participants. 62 of them participated in at least one of the 3 optional training days that were organised after the training.

3. Central notions

The LAs that were recruited for the training share characteristics with non-professional interpreters (NPIs): they do not possess "the required qualifications or skills to do the job generally performed by professional interpreters" (Angelelli, 2020, p. 115) nor do they receive remuneration or have recognised expertise (Martínez-Gómez, 2015). Research into non-professional interpreting has pointed out some of the pitfalls of working with non-professional interpreters, addressing issues related to mistranslations, omissions and terminological difficulties, due to either insufficient language competencies or a lack of knowledge of the subject matter (Pöllabauer, 2017; Schouten et al., 2012). Aside from concerns with message transfer, there has been a keen interest in the NPIs' institutionalisation processes (Aguilar Solano, 2015) and role boundaries (Martínez-Gómez, 2014; Pöchhacker & Kadric, 1999).

While NPIs are less bound by deontological regulations or even "unaware of basic standards of practice delineating their expected role" (Martínez-Gómez, 2020, p. 114), the LAs we report on here were briefly familiarised with basic ethical principles included in the COC for PSI in Flanders. Ethical principles are "intricately interwoven with the role of interpreters" (Pöllabauer & Topolovec, 2020, p. 211) and the ways in which codes of conduct model interpreters' roles. Codes of conduct typically formulate "the core moral concepts, values or principles of a profession […] express an ideal of right behaviour and […] contain information to guide practitioners in aligning with that ideal and outsiders in understanding what the profession does (or should do)" (Baixauli-Olmos 2020, p. 298). The COC for PSI in Flanders emphasises five key elements: (1) confidentiality, (2) neutrality, (3) completeness and accuracy, (4) transparency (e.g. through reporting back on side-interaction with either interlocutor) and (5) professional conduct, which includes, for instance, the obligation to explain common standards of practice at the start of the interaction for all interlocutors (Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering, 2017b). While in practice interpreters' roles vary greatly, ranging on a continuum from "a distinctively distanced and non-activist role to a decidedly (intentionally or unintentionally) activist and interventionist role, with a range of roles in between" (Pöllabauer & Topolovec, 2020, p. 215), many of the prescriptive demands included in the Flemish COC orient towards an ideal of the interpreter as non-activist: an interpreter is not "to provide any information other than the interpretation of the message, either on their own initiative or at the request of one of the parties […] does not at any time take part in the conversations […] sticks to the interpreting assignment and does not […] for example,

fill in any documents for (one of) the parties" (Agentschap Integratie & Inburgering, 2017b, p. 2, our translation).

Research on professional standards of practice and codes of ethics in PSI generally also includes discussions on accuracy, which tops "most of the codes of ethics for public service interpreting" (Gil-Bardají, 2020, p. 132). Defining accuracy is challenging, not in the least in PSI contexts, where the dialogic interpreting perspective (Wadensjö, 1998) implies the idea of co-construction of meaning, and therefore also the co-construction of accuracy (Tiselius, 2015). Pinpointing accuracy solely at the level of either content or linguistic equivalence is problematic; omissions may be necessary to ensure accuracy (Hale, 1997, p. 211), interpreters may add information and still achieve accuracy (Major & Napier, 2012) and acceptable target language use (e.g. grammar, vocabulary) may in fact require deviations from linguistic equivalence (Gile, 1995). In an analysis of the accuracy of renditions by five 'mediator-interpreters', a denomination that points to the dual role as professional mediators and non-professional interpreters in Catalonia, Gil-Bardají (2020) defines accuracy in terms of types of renditions and frequency, using the taxonomy of renditions proposed by Wadensjö (1998), to which she adds one category inspired by Gavioli and Baraldi (2011). The five participants in Gil-Baradjí's study (2020) "exhibit a significant lack of accuracy" (2020, p. 145), which connects with the broader debate on the varying degrees of intervention of the public service interpreter, in particular when the interpreting subjects "are characterized by a dual nature, halfway between two professions – intercultural mediation and PSI – with distinct objectives, codes of conduct, and competencies" (2020, p. 146).

In Flanders, the profiles of public service interpreters and intercultural mediators are more neatly distinguished. Both profiles suffer less from the "terminological fuzziness" (Pokorn & Mikolič Južnič 2020, p. 86) of what in many European countries seem to be "competing profiles" (p. 81). In their textual comparison of 13 deontological documents for public service interpreters and intercultural mediators, one of the conclusions is that the codes of ethics of public service interpreters emphasises impartiality, whereas the documents defining the profile of intercultural mediators position advocacy more prominently (Pokorn & Mikolič Južnič 2020, p. 99). These differences in task types also apply to intercultural mediators working in Flanders: they mediate between parties with the aim "to reduce the negative consequences of language barriers, socio-cultural differences and tensions between ethnic groups in healthcare settings" (Verrept & Coune, n.d., p. 7). Public service interpreters, on the other hand, are explicitly forbidden to do so by their COC. Two other differences set the two profiles apart: (1) settings –PSI work in a variety of settings such as education, integration, healthcare and social welfare whereas intercultural mediators in Belgium mainly work in healthcare– and (2) their overarching organizational structures: public service interpreter services are funded by the Flemish government whereas intercultural mediators in hospitals are funded by the Belgian Federal government (Van de Geuchte & Van Vaerenbergh, 2017). Clearly, being trained by the Integration Agency, which depends on the Flemish Government, the LAs included in this study were expected to perform roles oriented more towards the ideal of invisibility and non-intervention.

4. Assessment of the LAs: methodology

Several months after the training, the participating LAs were invited to take part in an assessment, for which the Agency set up a collaboration with external researchers (authors 1 and 2). The aim of the assessment was to examine whether working with LAs implies possible risks for the quality of public service provision. The quality was considered at risk when the LAs' interpreting performances led to unacceptable content deviations, pragmatic shifts or situational mismatches (see also the next section).

For the assessment, authors 1 and 2 analysed video-recordings of fifteen authentic interactions between Dutch-speaking service providers and non-Dutch-speaking clients in six facilities spread across three Flemish regional capital cities. The interactions were interpreted by LAs who had previously participated in the training and volunteered for the assessment phase. All recordings took place between May and July 2019. Informed consent was obtained from all interlocutors prior to recording. The total duration of the recordings is 8 hours 20 minutes and 54 seconds, with an average of 33 minutes and 24 seconds per interaction. The sectors in which the conversations took place vary from integration, reception for asylum seekers to social welfare and education. In total, we observed nine different LAs in fifteen interviews, four of whom were involved in more than one conversation (T3, T4, T5 and T6). Across all conversations, the LAs spoke five different languages: Farsi, Turkish, Somali, Kurdish and Arabic (see the Appendix for an anonymised summary table).

For the analysis of the video-recorded interactions we used ELAN, a piece of software that facilitates transcription and annotation in language research. In a first transcription round, the turns in Dutch were transcribed by student assistants or author 4 and supervised by author 1. The turns of speech in languages other than Dutch were transcribed and then back-translated by external translators for research purposes (Baker, 2018) as none of the researchers involved had immediate access to Farsi, Turkish, Somali, Kurdish and Arabic, which were the five languages other than Dutch included in the assessment phase. Author 4 was responsible for the communication with the external translators, as well as the management and supervision of their work.

We analysed the data using overarching coding categories related to topic organisation, conversational organisation (overlap, interruption), message transfer, speech style, note-taking, standards of practice and language proficiency. Accuracy, the first central category for discussion in this paper, was measured by the number and types of additions, omissions, reductions, generalisations, nuances, summarising, zero transfers, and erroneous renditions, all of which are categories that are grounded in previous work by interpreting scholars (Arumí & Vargas-Urpi, 2018; Gavioli & Baraldi, 2011; Wadensjö, 1998). Another central category, language proficiency, was operationalised through categories related to adequate language use (grammar, vocabulary, terminology) and delivery features (pronunciation, hesitations). COC adherence, which will also be discussed in the next section, was analysed by reference to the ethical principles and required standards of practice that are included in the COC for public service interpreters in Flanders (see also section one).

The analysis was carried out in accordance with the principles of researcher triangulation (Denzin, 1978) over different steps of the research process. The annotations of three junior researchers from a first analysis cycle were checked by authors 1 and 2 in a second cycle. All interviews were first evaluated holistically, and subsequently ranked on a continuum ranging from interviews with a (relatively) high-quality interpreting performance, to interviews with a (relatively) low-quality interpreting performance. This was done by the two researchers from the second cycle, first separately, then jointly. During a second analysis cycle, we combined a qualitative with a quantitative approach.

5. Findings

In the holistic evaluation of the video-recorded interpreting performances, merely two out of the nine observed LAs (T1 and T5) were evaluated as performing *satisfactorily*, i.e. meeting the minimal requirements for qualitative interpreting. Four LAs (T4, T7, T8, T9) were assessed as performing *unsatisfactorily*, i.e. not meeting those requirements while showing, however, some potential for developing interpreting skills if additional training were to be provided. The three remaining LAs (T2, T3, T6) delivered interpreting performances that were assessed as

unacceptable, given that adequate service provision could not at all be guaranteed and was even jeopardised. Across all participants, the assessment of the LAs' interpreting performances proved predominantly negative. The second-round analysis displays an enormous discrepancy between participants, with widely varying results for the categories we studied.

In what follows, we will show excerpts from our dataset to illustrate our findings. The originally spoken turn is followed by an English translation in italics. The problematic instances we want to highlight appear in bold.

5.1. Accuracy

The first main risk that we identified concerns the accuracy of the interpreted information. A great contrast emerged between the perceived smoothness of the interactions and the actual issues of interpreting accuracy and ethics that were discovered. The comparative textual analysis of original and interpreted turns did indeed illustrate 'false fluency', meaning that "interactions appear fluent and unproblematic, but in fact conceal significant miscommunication" (Cox, 2015, p. 32). The total number of annotated subcomponents corresponding to accuracy was 3772. Due to limited space and given the scope of our contribution, we will focus on the categories that occurred most frequently throughout the dataset, i.e. *omissions* (n = 1358) and *additions* (n = 824), and on a category that was less frequent but invariably puts the quality of the interpreting at risk, namely *erroneous renditions* (n = 215).[1]

Omissions are assessed as problematic when they lead to the omission of speaker intentions, as shown in excerpt 1. At the very beginning of this social-service interview, in which the service provider offers guidance for housing, the service provider states that she wishes to "hurry things up" because her next client is already waiting (G2, T2, 00:01:06). This information, which is crucial for the management of the clients' expectations, was not interpreted by the LA. When the service provider (SP) expresses her urgency a second time, as is shown in excerpt 1, the LA again fails to convey this information to the client. Instead, upon completion of the turn shown in excerpt 1, the client initiates a new topic, which causes the interview to last another six minutes.

Excerpt 1 (G2, T2, Somali, 00:27:33-00:27:42)

01 SP   voor de rest geen vragen? want ja dan zou ik willen afronden, aangezien die man daar nog aan 't wachten is in de wachtzaal.

*other than that no questions? because yeah **I would like to wrap up**, given that that man there is still waiting in the waiting room.*

02 LA   een waxyaabo kale maad dooneysaa inaad weydiisid

do you want to ask about other things

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[1] Clearly, we acknowledge that *additions* and *omissions* do not - by their very nature - correspond to reduced interpreting quality and jeopardised service provision. We recognise that they can oftentimes be considered unproblematic or of a low impact, or that they, as suggested by Hale (1997, p. 211), among others, are even required to guarantee accuracy. Similarly, when the client has understood the utterance in the institutional language, which prompts the interpreter to "step back and leave the floor" (Meyer, 2012, p. 111), we do not consider this problematic. Once again, the scope of this article involves zooming in on the instances in which these types of deviations do become problematic.

Additions were found to be problematic when they lead to the interlocutors communicating on parallel tracks and the client having false expectations of the public service institution. Such an instance can be observed in excerpt 2 from an interview situated in a local integration office. There, the service provider (SP) mentions that during the social integration course, one of the course topics will be 'work'. In her rendition, the LA adds that during the course the participants will learn about the Belgian law, which leads the client (C) to think that this course might help the client and their family with their asylum procedure.

Excerpt 2 (G6.1, T6, Arabic, 00:10:49-00:12:08)

01 SP   we gaan kijken voor euhm voor werken euhm in de tijdens de cursus oriëntatie zij gaan ook over werk praten

             we will look for uhm for working uhm in the during the social integration course they will also talk about work

02 LA

             حيت لما تا تاخذين يعني تدرسين هنا الاندماج يكلموكِ على كل شيء، ال القانون لبلجيكا، بس وحتى على الدراسة، على الشغل !، كيف يعني الشغل، ال ال، الفرص المتيحة للشغل.

             *because when you receive I mean learn here integration then they will tell you everything, **the the law of Belgium**, but also about studying, work! how work is I mean, the the, the chances offered by work*

((four turns omitted, in which the service provider elaborates on this topic and both the client and LA utter the phrase إِنْ شَاءَ ٱللَّه, 'In Sha Allah'))

07 C

             يقدرو يساعدونا (اكس)على شغلنا؟ إنه (اكس)اتأخرت، ما أخذنا إقامة، ويقدرو هون يساعدونا بما إنه يدرّسولنا القانون البلجيكي.

             *they can help us (x) for our work? that (x) stays away, we did not receive the right of residence, and **here they can help us because they teach us about the Belgian law**.*[2]

Erroneous renditions are obviously always considered problematic, and their impact can be profound. In excerpt 3, taken from an interview between a teacher and a mother, the teacher (T) explains that during the week following this interview, the school will be organising 'relationship days' ('relatiedagen') in which the pupils receive information on sexuality, the body, gender equality, and so forth. She warns the mother that some children, including hers, might feel awkward, act differently or ask particular questions. The teacher also informs the mother that the school will provide a separate room for pupils who need a moment for themselves. In his rendition, the LA mentions a cultural gap, whereas that was not at all what the teacher conveyed.

Excerpt 3 (G3.2, T3, Somali, 00:13:53-00:14:33)

01 T   en er is ook een kamer waar als het teveel is voor de leerlingen we hebben leerkrachten hier die euh als er een leerling moeilijkheden heeft of niet meer wil

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[2] (x) stands for inaudible or incomprehensive speech.

volgen of dan kan die ook apart genomen worden en eventjes tot rust komen dus we hebben ook alles voorzien voor

and there is also a room where if it is too much for the pupils we have teachers here who uhm if a pupil has difficulties or does not want to attend anymore or then they can be taken separately and calm down for a bit so we are prepared for

02 LA   waxaa iyadu… dadkan wax walbay ka hortagaan, markaa waxaa ay leedahay ilmuhu hadduu isku arki waayo wixii… way dhici kartaa markaa uu ka baxo meesha uu yiraahdo waxaan dhaqankayga ma aha iyo waxaa inuu meel iska tago meel baa loo diyaariyey, meelbaa..qolbaa loo diyaariyaa si uu dib isku soo noqdo waxaas hadday dhacdo

*she… these people do everything for prevention, so she says if the child can't see anything related to his **culture**... it can happen and leaves the place and he says that **this is not my culture** so he can go to somewhere they were prepared for somewhere, a room was prepared for them think and compare if that happens*

Other similar excerpts show the serious, far-reaching consequences that accuracy-related issues can have: clients receive incorrect information or no information at all (e.g. on the right to and modalities of reimbursement of a bus pass, on the opening days of daycare, on the enrolment of children for summer activities), which raises false expectations among interlocutors; they increase the duration of the encounters, which sits uncomfortably with institutional time constraints, and they have an impact on rapport building (e.g. when utterances of expressed sympathy and empathy are omitted).

We link the above-mentioned accuracy-related issues to interpreter competence. First, omissions occurred more frequently when the turns of the primary speakers were longer. This indicates that many of the LAs have difficulties rendering longer information segments, which points to an underdevelopment of their working memory. Second, although the connection between accuracy and note-taking could not be examined in detail with our dataset since all observed LAs (with one exception) barely took notes, it could be argued that precisely the lack of note-taking is an explanatory factor for the overall high occurrence of omissions. Third, the observed LAs seemed to lack the conversational management skills that are needed in order to prevent primary speakers' turns from exceeding a certain 'interpretable' length.

Accuracy also seemed closely related to language proficiency. We found that the interviews with the two LAs we assessed as performing satisfactorily (T1 and T5) contained significantly less language proficiency annotations compared to the three LAs assessed as performing unacceptably (T2, T3 and T6). Moreover, T1 and T5 both reached a CEFR level of B2 for Dutch, whereas this was not the case for T2 and T6. T3, however, whose performance had also been assessed as *unacceptable*, did have a command of Dutch corresponding to a B2-level, but the unacceptability of his performance is related to insufficient ethical awareness, as we will illustrate further below.

5.2. Code of conduct adherence

The second great risk that we identified concerns the LAs' adherence to COC, which was assessed by referring to the five components of the interpreters' COC as stated in the guidelines for PSI in Flanders. Given that several of the components overlap frequently, we will discuss them comprehensively instead of separately.

The first component under study was the introduction of *standards of practice*, i.e. whether the LAs introduce themselves at the start of the interview and if so, whether the introduction is complete and fluently delivered. In our dataset, only one out of nine LAs introduced herself and her professional role referring to all compulsory elements. This LA was part of the group of two who had been assessed as performing *satisfactorily* during the holistic evaluation. The remaining LAs either introduced themselves only partially or did not introduce themselves at all.

The second variable consisted of handling ethical conflicts by referring to the COC. The findings from this analysis are not clear-cut. Comparisons across the LAs were difficult because the number and types of ethical conflicts requiring the LAs' referral to the COC vary greatly. What did draw our attention, however, is that in the interviews where indirect speech was used very frequently by the interlocutors, three LAs (of whom two had been assessed as performing *unacceptably* and one as *unsatisfactory*) did not take it upon themselves to ask the primary speakers to use direct speech. This contrasts clearly with one LA, categorised as performing *satisfactorily,* who did remind the interlocutors to use direct speech on the few occasions they deviated from it.

Thirdly, we studied whether the LAs reported back on side-interaction. Four LAs, all of whom had been assessed as performing *unsatisfactorily* and *unacceptably*, frequently engaged in side-interaction with one of the interlocutors without reporting back to the other party. Not surprisingly, the performances of two of them showed a remarkably higher number of non-renditions. Non-renditions refer to interpreter-initiated utterances that have no correspondence whatsoever with an original turn (Wadensjö, 1998). This is striking in the interpreter performances of the LA at work in an educational context (see also excerpt 3 above), who frequently engaged in self-initiated advice-giving. For instance, during an interaction between a teacher and her pupil, the pupil's still basic Dutch language proficiency is discussed. The LA at work advises the pupil to go to the library and read books as a language learning strategy (G3.1, T3, 00:14:29). The teacher is unaware of the content of this side-interaction, which was initiated by the LA and never reported back to her. Another example is shown in excerpt 4, where the language assistant, right after rendering the teacher's (T) original turn from Dutch into Somali, addresses a question to her referring to the pupil's discipline.

Excerpt 4 (G3.1, T3, Somali, 00:13:16-00:13:33)

01 T   voor de rest heb ik geen vragen of niks meer te vertellen over [eigennaam leerling]. prima student. blijf zo verder doen. 'eel goe!

other than that I have no questions or nothing more to say about [pupil's name]. great student. keep up the good work. very good!

02 LA   waxaa weeyaan arday fiican weeyaan [pupil's name], waxaan ka sheego ma leh sida kale

she said, [pupil's name] is a very good student, there is nothing bad to report about him?

//towards T// over discipline da gaat wel met hem hé?

about discipline that's okay with him, right?

The issues described above are closely related to the different roles adopted by the LAs during the interviews, another component we examined and identified as an important risk factor for the quality of communication during service provision. Throughout the dataset, three LAs, assessed as performing *unacceptably* or *unsatisfactorily* (T3, T6, T8), deviate considerably

from a neutral interpreter stance. For instance, in excerpt 3, the LA adopts the role of intercultural mediator rather than interpreter. Conversely, another LA does not so much engage in cultural mediation as push herself and her personal opinions to the forefront, thus jeopardising her impartiality. This is illustrated in excerpt 5, where she judges the clients' poor comprehension skills and addresses a remark about it to the service provider (SP). This highly face-threatening act can adversely affect the way the service provider perceives the client throughout the interview.

Excerpt 5 (G6.2, T6, Arabic, 00:00:37-00:00:50)

01 SP   dus inburgering is een programma die bestaat uit twee delen

          so civic integration is a programme that consists of two parts

02 LA   hm hm

03 SP   eentje is het Nederlands leren en de tweede is leren over leven in Vlaanderen

          one is learning Dutch and the second one is learning about life in Flanders

04 LA   //towards SP// **in stapjes meneer begrijpt niet veel hé**

          in small steps the gentleman doesn't understand much, right

The roles adopted by the LAs are diverse. Contrary to the above-mentioned examples of role shifts, some LAs displayed a remarkable adherence to the COC. Given the far-reaching consequences of the observed role shifts for both the transparency of the interaction and the impartiality of the LA, we argue that this aspect of ethical awareness poses substantial risks when working with LAs.

       Finally, we looked at the use of direct speech by the language assistants themselves. In our dataset, an average of two out of five utterances were not interpreted in the first person, as expected by the Flemish COC. When we home in on each of the interviews separately, what stands out is an enormous difference between the LAs. In fact, three of them (two of whom had been assessed as performing *satisfactorily*) consistently maintained the use of the first person. For the remaining six LAs, using the first person is still difficult. Two LAs in particular, i.e. the same LAs we discussed earlier (T3 and T6), use indirect speech more often than direct speech, which is in line with their role alignment as primary speakers throughout the whole interview.

6. Conclusion: follow-up

Our assessment of nine briefly trained LAs at work in authentic service provision interviews presents a highly varied picture, with each individual LA displaying different needs for further training. Nevertheless, and apart from the fact that the LAs' interpreting performances were predominantly assessed as unsatisfactory, the main shortcomings that we identified when working with LAs mainly tie in with interpreter competence and language proficiency, which jeopardise accuracy, and code of conduct adherence. Clearly, two days of training were insufficient for the participants to master the required skillset and knowledge. This conclusion is hardly surprising; results of similar short training programmes were very mixed, even in

situations where participants received up to 40 hours of training (Hale & Ozolins, 2014), more than the double of what was offered in this case.

Therefore, after the first project, the Integration Agency strongly advised against situations in which uncertified interpreters are employed under the pretext that no alternative is possible, an argument echoed by many local facilities when working with uncertified interpreters. At the same time, and ironically, the existence of these types of local practices provides overwhelming arguments for facilitating at least some type of training.

That is why in a follow-up project, several of the identified risk factors were addressed. First, at the level of recruitment, more effort was necessary to pitch training at the right level and select candidates appropriately, in particular in relation to the required entrance level of Dutch, which was raised to a CEFR level of B2 and measured by means of a compulsory entry test. All participants received detailed feedback on the test and, most importantly, practical information on further opportunities for Dutch language proficiency (e.g. specialised websites offering exercises, customised language practice opportunities, formal instruction programmes).

In addition to screening language competency more strictly at the start of the training, the content of the training was adjusted. In order to train LAs to handle role conflict and role shifting adequately, the LAs' neutral participation in the encounters was emphasised much more during training. The scripted role plays that were used for training purposes were adapted so that trainees were faced with more and more diverse ethical conflicts. These exercises were coupled with case-study based reflection activities. In addition, LAs were trained in interpreter strategies that allowed them to both respect and more easily apply more easily the principles of completeness and accuracy.

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