**Self-presentations of students participating in a Community Interpreting course**

PhD thesis

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Submitted: October 2017, approved: May 2018

**Abstract**

The present case study explores self-presentations of students participating in a community interpreting course which includes vocational training in class and volunteering in public institutions and social organizations, at a time community interpreting, an occupation characterized by asymmetry (as in interpreter-mediated interactions power is distributed asymmetrically between the agents), is still at its infancy and not yet institutionalized in the multicultural Israeli context. The study examines written and oral self-presentations collected during four academic years (2009-2012) of the Community Interpreting course at Bar-Ilan University (Israel), and looks at what the student-interpreters narrate, how and why, using multiple data types, theories and methods, and paying attention to the contexts in which the student-interpreter self-presentations were produced.

The first chapter presents the theoretical framework used in this study: Bourdieu’s theory and central concepts such as habitus, field and capital, and the narrative approach, assuming that the student-interpreter self-presentations in the context of their practice simultaneously reflect and construct them as community interpreters. During the Community Interpreting course, students operate within several fields, and their conduct is guided by a specific (narrative) habitus that not only structures their practice while simultaneously being structured by it, but also structures their self-presentations while also being structured by these self-presentations. The chapter also provides an overview of the relevant theoretical literature in Translation and Interpreting Studies.

The second chapter introduces the historical and social background, and the state of affairs of language accessibility and community interpreting in Israel, so as to contextualize the case study. Contrary to what one might expect in a country with a wide spectrum of indigenous and migrant minorities, translation and interpreting in Israel have neither achieved a high level of recognition nor gained considerable symbolic and economic capital. Community interpreting is at the very periphery of translational occupations and remains under-defined. Within these conditions, in 2007 the Community Interpreting course was launched; its detailed description is also provided in the chapter.

The third chapter is primarily methodological. It presents the case study strategy and introduces the data sources (student-interpreters' written reports, assignments and oral presentations); the participants whose self-presentations make up the data sources (73 female and male students of indigenous and immigrant minorities, Arabic, Russian, Amharic and Spanish speakers); the methods of data analysis and interpretation, and the research procedures. It explains in particular the study's detailed qualitative analysis through a first-step inductive corpus-based method (the written self-presentations were compiled for an electronic corpus, and their prominent keywords were compared to those in a much larger and far more heterogeneous corpus) and a further in-depth holistic deductive method. This analysis is presented in the fourth chapter.

The aim of the categorical corpus-based analysis was to provide a "big picture", and its contribution is evident in all the findings of the further in-depth holistic analysis. This analysis, combined with narrative methods, also includes data interpretation based on the theoretical framework of the study, paying attention to the threefold context in which the student-interpreter self-presentations were produced: the immediate context (a dialogue with the course instructors, as part of the curriculum's requirements), the micro-context (the narrow circle of the students' life: experiences that occurred recently or that are expected to take place in the near future) and the macro-context (the broad social and political circumstances in the multiculturalism of Israel). The multiple reading of the data revealed three thematic inter-dependent dimensions, the same as those identified during the first step inductive analysis. a time dimension which refers to the formal volunteering framework, the routine of on-site interpreting and students' personal and professional development; a space/place dimension which relates to the course as a general framework,as well as to the volunteering settings, meaning the professional fields in which the students interpreted: healthcare, social services, and human rights organizations; and an interaction dimension which addresses two course elements: class participation, including training and interaction with various agents (fellow students, course instructors, university), and volunteering as community interpreters in various fields with their agents (service providers, clients and ad hoc interpreters) – all within the context of community interpreting (involving role perceptions, on-site conduct, difficulties and dilemmas, emotions). In all the thematic dimensions and themes identified within them, commonly-held views were found, an indication of the student-interpreters as a distinctive group.

Research findings, summarized and discussed in the fifth chapter, propose a complex picture of student-interpreter conduct, as manifest and constructed in their self-presentations. The specific personal and social trajectories of the students (including the fact that most represent minority groups in multicultural Israel, their competence in both majority and minority languages, and thus the experience in natural interpreting), along with their personalities (with personal traits such as empathy, initiative, gumption, willingness to volunteer, social skills), become the relevant background designating them to become community interpreters and a capital resource through which they try to accumulate capital and promote status. This initial habitus serves as a basis for development of their professional habitus during their course participation. Several other factors such as training provided by the instructors, the powerful agents in the translation field, were also found to be significant. Students learn that what they previously called "help" is actually the important community interpreting profession, requiring training and institutionalization, with adequate knowledge and best practices which determine its boundaries. An additional factor is the dynamics of professional fields in which students interpret, and where they are meant to implement knowledge and tools acquired in class. In these professional fields, many well established and all far more institutionalized than community interpreting, students operate in tandem with their agents of relatively stable positions, at a time community interpreting is not yet institutionalized and community interpreters are not yet legitimate agents. Their role is still largely unclear to these agents, and the students have to negotiate their positions without disrupting the existing hierarchy. The role of these interpreters is also often unclear to marginalized clients, of the same minorities most of the students themselves belong to. The role of student-interpreters is positioned somewhere on a scale of neutrality vs. advocacy, meaning transparency vs. visibility, a passive role vs. an active role. Regardless of where they are positioned on this scale, the students often refer to their occupation as assistance, in line with natural interpreting as part of their initial habitus. Willingness to help seems to be one of the vital traits necessary for community interpreting – an assistance motivated by emotion, primarily empathy and reaction to the distress of clients – that eventually leads to another emotion, primarily satisfaction.

The students' specific initial habitus, the dynamics of the professional fields they step into as interpreters, and the dynamics of course training with the instructors and during studies with fellow classmates challenge the development of a professional habitus of the student-interpreters and thus their conduct. "Natural" elements encounter "nurtured" or acquired elements, so that in this sense students are natural interpreters who undergo training ("nurtured natural"). Although it is difficult to identify one uniform position of students in the community interpreting field, or to speak of just one habitus, the professional habitus(es) of all students maintain amongst themselves homologous relations, as is evident in the self-presentations rooted within – and limited by – the threefold context in which they are produced. In the immediate context, the student-interpreters reflect and construct their conduct and the interaction with agents in time and space, both in class and on-site, narrating for the instructors in the framework of the curriculum's requirements. The broader context also plays a crucial role. However aware the students may be of its importance, at times prevailing over the importance of community interpreter training, in most self-presentations they reflect and reproduce complexities of the Israeli macro-context, particularly as regards indigenous and immigrant minorities, language accessibility and community interpreting.

While findings of the present study are valid only in relation to the self-presentations of students participating in the Community Interpreting course, it is nevertheless assumed that the phenomena may be present in the narrations of other community interpreters undergoing training and interacting with various agents in time and place. In a broad sense, these findings may shed light on community interpreting and contribute to other studies focusing on translators and interpreters conducted in Israel and elsewhere.