INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE OF AN INTERPRETER

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Abstract
This article examines the concept of intercultural competence in interpreting as a multidimensional construct that goes beyond linguistic proficiency. It emphasizes that interpreting is not merely the transfer of meaning between languages but a complex process of mediating between cultures. The study outlines the essential components of intercultural competence, including attitudes, skills, knowledge, and behaviors, which together enable interpreters to perform effectively in cross-cultural communication contexts. Special attention is given to the interpreter’s role in ensuring accuracy, neutrality, and cultural sensitivity while facilitating communication between parties from different cultural backgrounds. The article also highlights the importance of systematic training and assessment of intercultural competence within interpreter education programs. Ultimately, it argues that highly competent interpreters serve as crucial mediators who bridge linguistic and cultural gaps in professional and social interactions.

Keywords: *intercultural competence; interpreting; cross-cultural communication; cultural mediation; linguistic competence; sociolinguistic skills; interpreter training; communication accuracy; cultural awareness; professional ethics.*

The process of translating is never purely a matter of rendering meaning from one language into another but is always related to “translating/mediating” from one culture into another [2, p. 46]. Thus, the intercultural translator or mediator is seen as displaying knowledge, skills and abilities in the following spheres: theoretical, textual and interpersonal. Therefore, it is especially important that future interpreter’s intercultural competence should be both systematically developed through a carefully structured curriculum and assessed according to clear assessment criteria [3, p. 112]. An interpreter should be someone who is proficient in the language; educated and experienced in cross cultural communication and the principles and dynamics of serving as an interpreter; educated in the appropriate professional field relevant to the specific–service provider interaction, and be able to understand and appreciate the respective cultures of both parties and to convey the more subtle nuances of each with tact and sensitivity. Aside from such ideal competencies, the interpreter should at the minimum have a basic understanding of the specific nature and purpose of the interaction with the client, the content areas to be addressed, and the relative significance of these content areas in the larger context. He or she should be able to translate information accurately, including important technical terms and the client’s own words and true meaning, without omitting, adding, paraphrasing, or otherwise changing the intent or the substance of the message through personal interpretation. In other words, the interpreter should not gloss over details; present his or her own abbreviated summaries; spontaneously respond to the client’s questions or comments; “soften” or edit information that he or she feels may

be difficult for the client to accept; or offer his or her own opinions, interpretations, and advice.

Accurate translation further entails understanding the difference between literal “word-for-word” translation and context translation that correctly conveys the intent of the communication, particularly when selected English words or terms do not have suitable equivalents. Interpreters also should know how to “guide” the service provider respectfully and assertively with regard to pacing, responding appropriately to client cues and significant verbal and nonverbal responses. Finally, interpreters should exhibit professionalism in their appearance, sensitivity, and demeanor; their understanding of the importance of honoring client’s confidentiality; and their obligation to maintain neutrality in their designated role. Another concern relates to the extent of the interpreter’s skills in both languages. Many people have bilingual interpersonal competence that allows them to function in either language in daily life; however, their skills may not be adequate to understand or to explain issues that arise in intervention.

The following components form the core of intercultural competence of an interpreter:

Attitudes: respect for other cultures; curiosity about other cultures; willingness to learn about other cultures; openness to people from other cultures; willingness to suspend judgment; willingness to tolerate ambiguity; and valuing cultural diversity.

Skills: skills of listening to people from other cultures; skills of interacting with people from other cultures; skills of adapting to other cultural environments; linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse skills, including skills in managing breakdowns in communication; skills in mediating intercultural exchanges; skills in discovering information about other cultures; skills of interpreting cultures and relating cultures to one another; empathy; cognitive flexibility; and skills in critically evaluating cultural perspectives, practices and products, including those of one’s own culture.

Knowledge: cultural self-awareness; communicative awareness, especially of the different linguistic and communicative conventions within different cultures; culture-specific knowledge, especially knowledge of the perspectives, practices and products of particular cultural groups; and general cultural knowledge, especially knowledge of processes of cultural, societal and individual interaction.

Behaviors: behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately during intercultural encounters; flexibility in cultural behavior; flexibility in communicative behavior; and having an action orientation, that is, a disposition for action in society in order to enhance the common good, especially through the reduction of prejudice, discrimination and conflict.

Good interpreters are invaluable resources for human services agencies in which many of the service providers do not share clients languages and cultural backgrounds. Developing and maintaining positive relationships with individuals who, through interpreting and translating, can help bridge the gap between clients and service providers is critically important for effective cross-cultural communication.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, intercultural competence is a fundamental requirement for professional interpreters, encompassing not only linguistic proficiency but also a deep understanding of cultural dynamics and communication practices. Effective interpreting requires a balanced integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and appropriate behaviors that allow interpreters to act as accurate and neutral mediators between cultures [3, p. 189]. The ability to convey meaning faithfully while respecting cultural nuances and maintaining professional ethics is essential in ensuring successful communication. Furthermore, the development of intercultural competence should be a central objective in interpreter education, supported by structured curricula and clear assessment criteria. As globalization continues to intensify intercultural interactions, the role of interpreters becomes increasingly significant. Therefore, fostering high levels of intercultural competence is critical for enhancing mutual understanding, reducing miscommunication, and promoting effective collaboration across cultures.

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