Training in Community Interpreting – An African Experience

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Brussels, Belgium, 07 April 2017
Introductory Remarks

• A follow-up to the paper published in 2005 on “Community Interpreting - An African Perspective”

• Questions:
  – What are developments since then, at least in matters of practice and training?
  – Are developments conclusive or inconclusive?

• Focus: ASTI, University of Buea, Cameroon
Towards a Definition of Community Interpreting 1

• Traditionally, community interpreting or PSI is simply defined as interpreting to ensure communication between a public service (hospital, court, police, etc.) and people who do not master the mainstream language.

• Here, ‘community interpreting' is interpreting to facilitate mutual understanding between speakers of the mainstream language (usually the official language) and those with limited proficiency in this language.

• Community practice is therefore carried out, as matter of right, from and “into minority languages in order to ensure communication with all citizens and residents of a country and empower minority language users by giving them access to information and enabling them to participate in society” (my emphasis).
Towards a Definition of Community
Interpreting 2

Preferred descriptors:

– community+social communication vs public service,
– “language vs setting” (minority vs majority language, official vs non-official language community);
– both local and migrant communities,
– a “human right” rather than a favour
– overall focus on community wellbeing, effective social communication and individual empowerment)
Community Practice as a Relatively Old Practice but New Discipline

• an everyday practice across Africa (inc. courts, hospitals, police, community radios and TVs, churches, civil status registries, movies, etc.) without prior training, and often associated with some amount of “community translation”

• offered as an elective course of 2-4 hours a week in mainstream ASTI MA programmes since the 2007-2008 academic year

• reinforced as an elective course since 2013-2014 with the inception of PAUTRAIN MA programmes
Some Challenges of Training in Community interpreting

- the tendency to view community interpreting with contempt; at best, as a lower type of practice/subject; at worst as nonexistent or useless
- an often wide variety of trainee languages in each class, with an average of 6-8 students and 4-6 different languages per year
- a questionable mastery of language by interested trainees
- scarcity/lack of reference material and unavailability of resource persons
Approach to Community interpreting
Teaching/Learning

• Community interpreting exclusively as an elective course to small groups of students who were initially admitted to study in the School’s major language combinations
• Trainees must have a reasonable mastery of speaking (and writing) in their chosen language
• Trainees must all have at least one of the teacher’s languages in common; method/process-centred rather than single-language focussed, student-centred and self-discovery approach to interpreting learning, with teacher simply used for scaffolding purposes
• Peer assessment encouraged, especially so where two or more students share the same language
• External examiner assessment in collaboration with course tutor
• Training through MA student research supervision
Prospects of training in community interpreting

• with each of 2500 African languages in mind and a shift from language diversity as a disadvantage to language diversity as cultural wealth, community interpreting is a real investment opportunity both for trainees and training institutions

• encouraging both monolanguage and multilanguage groups of trainees

• offering community interpreting as an elective course in programmes which focus exclusively on combinations of majority/dominant languages at master’s level

• offering community interpreting too as a fully-fledged certificate programme to already-trained professional interpreters or qualified linguists with requisite knowledge in the relevant minority endogenous African languages
Concluding Remarks: Advantages of Training in Community interpreting

- a major support to quality communication and inclusive (interpreter) education in both endogenous and exogenous languages in Africa (including interpreting from/into sign language and Braille)
- multilanguage (vs monolanguage) contributions of the community interpreting class are unique opportunities to explore novel ways for observing interpreting as a process over and beyond specific languages
- contribution to quality intercultural communication between users of exogenous languages and those of endogenous languages of Africa
Select Bibliography (Reverse Chronological Order)


Jërejëf!
Asante!
Thank you!
Merci!
Obrigado!
¡Gracias!