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**Title:** Face and ethics in professional interpreting

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**Citation style:** Bogdanowska-Jakubowska Ewa (2016). Face and ethics in professional interpreting. W: E. Bogdanowska-Jakubowska (red.), "New ways to face and (im)politeness" (S. 223-237). Katowice : Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego



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## Chapter 12

# Face and ethics in professional interpreting

*Ewa Bogdanowska-Jakubowska*

### **Abstract**

Interpreting can be considered a form of intercultural communication in which at least three participants take part – primary participants (the speaker and the hearer(s)) and the interpreter. This is interpreter-mediated communication in social interaction (Jacobsen, 2009). Thus the interpreter, like any other interaction participant, has face – “an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes” (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Face, which is created during social interaction, is both a property of relationships and a property of the individual, and is shaped by culture and the role he/she performs. Among the socially relevant qualities of the individual’s self-image, we can distinguish three groups of attributes:

- attributes tied to moral conduct (e.g., adherence to the code of professional ethics),
- attributes tied to a position in a social setting (e.g., professional competence of the interpreter),
- attributes tied to interpersonal skills and facework competence (e.g., coordinating/mediating skills).

To maintain face participants engage in facework (Goffman, 1967), actions which address face, involving threat and support as well as actions aimed at maintaining face.

The aim of the study is to analyse the interpreter’s professional face, its ethical aspect in particular, and facework strategies employed during interpreting. The study has been carried out within the framework of the *Cultural Face Model* (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska, 2010).

## **1. Introduction**

Interpreting can be considered a form of intercultural communication in which at least three participants take part – primary participants (the speaker and the hearer(s)) and the interpreter. This is interpreter-mediated communication in social interaction (Jacobsen, 2009). Thus the interpreter, like any other interaction

participant, has face – “an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes” (Goffman, 1967, p. 5). Face, which is created during social interaction, is both a property of relationships and a property of the individual, and is shaped by culture and the role the individual performs. The maintenance of the interpreter’s face depends on his/her complying with social norms existing in a particular culture, and in addition following the professional ethics, which specifies the way he/she should behave during professional encounters.

Practically all decisions [interpreters] make as professionals will potentially have ethical implications. [...] The decisions made during the course of translating and interpreting can potentially have considerable impact on the survival of individuals and even whole communities; at the very least they can impact the quality of life of those who rely on the translator or interpreter to mediate for them, whether in business meetings or healthcare encounters, in daily interaction between host country officials and vulnerable migrants, or in preparing instructions for the use of a food mixer. (Baker & Maier, 2011, p. 4)

The aim of the study is to analyse the interpreter’s professional face, its ethical aspect in particular. The study has been carried out within the framework of the *Cultural Face Model* (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska, 2010).

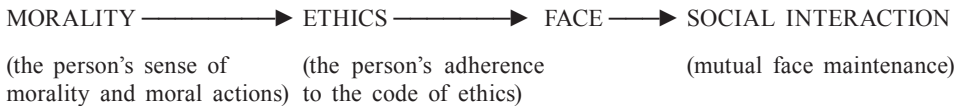
The data used in the analysis come from two sources. The first consists of codes of ethics for interpreters and translators published by interpreters’ associations and institutions hiring professional interpreters. To find what professional ethics means for interpreters, I have analysed a corpus of 33 codes of conduct (91,513 words). The second source of the data is the questionnaire carried out among 35 translators, all of them students of English Philology, MA Translation Program at the University of Silesia.

## 2. Face and face-management

As social interaction and communication always involve the other or others, any decision we take, any choice we make, has an impact on them. This can also influence face, which, according to Erving Goffman (1967), is “a condition of interaction.” Thus, to be able to interact with others successfully, or at all, individuals have to maintain their own face and the face of the others. To do so, they have to engage in highly moral activities, which are “moral” in the sense that they are motivated both by the sense of duty to themselves as well as to the others. Their moral decisions play an important role in the process of self construction. The ultimate goal of the individuals’

choice making and social activities is successful face-management, for example presenting themselves in the best possible light and making it possible for the others to do the same.

Morality is an indispensable element of the constant redefinition of the individual's face. It makes an individual human. "All our moral ideals, such as justice, fairness, compassion, virtue, tolerance, freedom, and rights, stem from our fundamental human concern with what is best for us and how we ought to live" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 290). Morality as a code of conduct exists in every society and every community. By adhering to it in social interaction an individual becomes part of his/her group. Thus there is a close relationship between face, morality and social interaction (see Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** One-way dependency in social encounters

Every social activity has a moral sense, and all moral choices are socially conditioned. An individual can behave in a moral way only in relation to others. Morality understood in this way constitutes "an externally functioning set of values. Reflecting the collective consciousness, moral values are actualised in social norms, which describe how to behave properly. They influence our expectations about behavioural responsibilities so that failure to fulfil these expectations may be perceived as a 'negatively eventful' occurrence, and the result may be face threat and/or face loss" (Spencer-Oatey, 2005; 2007, p. 652). Thus, the perception of some act as a face threat depends also on people's conceptions of rights and obligations, their conceptualizations of different role relationships and their different interpretations of face-related values (Spencer-Oatey, 2007, p. 652).

### 3. The Cultural Face Model

Public self-image (face) and the social need to orient oneself to it in interaction are universal, but face has also culture-specific constituents. Moral rules, hierarchies of values and social organization are specific to particular cultures; and as a consequence the image of self created on their basis must also differ.

Culture plays an explanatory role in an analysis of face. It is understood here as “the *context* in which people derive a sense of who they are, how they should behave, possibly where they are pointed in the future” (Fitzgerald, 1993, p. 59), and as “a patterned way of living by a group of interacting individuals who share similar sets of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, and behaviors. On a specific level, cultural values and norms influence the expectations that we hold in the development of personal relationship” (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 1996, pp. 237–238).

Interpreters, like other interactants, are members of a particular culture. Apart from that, they are also members of a particular professional group whose behaviour at work is determined by the code of professional ethics. Like any social interaction, interpreter-mediated interactions are norm-governed behaviour. Despite the rarity of recurrent situations in interpreting contexts, this type of activity is associated with certain values and ideas (cf. Monacelli, 2009; Shlesinger, 1989). Thus interpreter-mediated interaction can be analysed as any type of interaction, and its participants, the interpreter included, have to engage in facework, like any social interactants. What may differ is the content of face modified by the interpreting context.

In the Cultural Face Model, there are three aspects of face (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska, 2010):

- *Moral Face* – face tied to moral conduct (cf. the Chinese concept of *lian*; Goffman, 1967; Earley, 1997);
  - *Prestige Face* – face as a position in a social setting (cf. the Chinese concept of *mianzi*, Earley, 1997);
  - *Relational Face* – face tied to interpersonal skills and facework competence, and emerging from the relationship between interactants (cf. Arundale, 2006).
- All the constituents of face form a culture-general whole.

There is a close relationship between the process of creation of the self and the character of social interaction (Goffman, 1967). Face is intended to be supported by the judgements of other people the individual is interacting with. It is adjusted to the roles the individual plays in a particular context and the expectations of the others. The number of activities and relationships he/she is involved in is mapped on his/her self-concept which is represented as a set of self-aspects involving distinct roles, contexts, relationships, activities, traits and states (cf. James, 1890; Mead, 1934; Showers & Zeigler-Hill, 2003). As a consequence, every individual, every time he/she engages in self-presentation, has to “highlight” different aspects of his/her self relevant to the situation and get the acceptance of the others. This results in persons having multiple faces within their lifetime.

Within a single situation, a person may also show more than one face at the same time, and sometimes these faces may be in conflict. *Basic Face* is a self-image delineated in terms of approved social attributes, created irrespective of

the role the individual plays; it involves two aspects, moral and interactional. This self-image results from the person's sense of humanity and individual traits. *Primary Face* is the face related to a certain role of the person which prevails in a particular situation. *Secondary Face* is the face related to a certain role which is not central in a particular situation. Primary and secondary faces are role-specific, while basic face is role-general. In work situations, the individual shows his/her *Professional Face*, which is a self-image of the professional delineated in terms of approved attributes specific for a given profession. In a single social interaction, an individual can create at least two faces, Basic Face, specific for a given human being, and a face related to a certain role (e.g., Professional Face).

When studying a social role, the constellation of people is the basic analytical unit, not the individual. In exploring the role of dialogue interpreter one has to see her in relation to those others confirming or rejecting her in this role. You will also have to consider that individuals are multiple-role performers (Goffman, 1961: 142). The interpreter can be confirmed or not in her role as interpreter as well as in possible other social roles (such as woman, compatriot, foreigner, well-educated, etc.). (Wadensjö, 1995, pp. 115–116)

Thus the interpreter's self-image may be considered complex and multi-faceted, and as such cannot be analysed only in professional terms.

#### 4. Ethics in professional interpreting

Like face, ethics is social and relational in nature. Ethical behaviour forms an indispensable part of face maintenance. Ethics – understood as “a set of standards by which a particular group or community decides to regulate its behavior” – distinguishes “what is legitimate or acceptable in pursuit of their aims from what is not” (Flew, 1979, p. 112). It can refer to standards of morality that apply to people in relation to other people, and it can be associated with a specific activity or profession, for example, interpreting.

Interpreting has all the characteristics which turn an activity into a profession (cf. Millerson's definition of profession (1964; in Abercrombie et al., 2000, p. 279)). It involves the use of skills based on theoretical knowledge. Education and training in these skills are available in many universities and colleges. The competence of professional interpreters is ensured by examinations. Performance of the interpreting service is for the public good. There are professional associations that organize interpreters, and “whose role is to sanction the activity,

both in terms of endorsing the admission of new members and authorizing the manner in which the activity is carried out, to some extent, through the establishment of norms” (Monacelli, 2009, p. 10). Finally, every profession should have its own code of conduct which would ensure professional integrity. Such codes are formulated and published by interpreters’ associations and institutions hiring professional interpreters.

An analysis of the corpus of the selected codes of conduct showed that although each of them is addressed to a different group of interpreters (e.g., interpreters and translators in general, community interpreters, judiciary interpreters and interpreters for the deaf), they include an almost identical set of tenets. In each of the codes in the corpus, there can be found three main topics, the moral/ethical aspect of interpreting, the interpreter’s competence and norms of politeness for interpreters. Although all of them are important and constitute indispensable elements in interpreters’ professional activity, it is professional competence that is devoted most attention to and described in greatest detail in the corpus. Words related to it, in comparison to the words related to moral/ethical aspects of behaviour and words related to relational/interactional aspects of behaviour, are most numerous (22), are most frequently used, and constitute 1.49% of all the words used (see Table 2). There are 11 words related to moral/ethical aspects of interpreters’ behaviour, which constitute 0.51% of all the words in the corpus (see Table 1). Twelve words, related to relational/interactional aspects of behaviour, constitute only 0.24% of all the words used (see Table 3).

**Table 1.** The words, found in the corpus, related to moral/ethical aspects of behaviour

Words	Number of occurrences	Per cent	Number of texts
Ethics	139	0.1519	22
Confidentiality	76	0.0831	27
Ethical	67	0.0732	18
Confidential	54	0.0590	20
Impartiality	47	0.0514	22
Impartial	35	0.0383	20
Responsible	35	0.0383	13
Responsibilities	22	0.0240	11
Moral	6	0.0066	4
Accountability	3	0.0033	3
Accountable	3	0.0033	2

**Table 2.** The words, found in the corpus, related to professional competence

Words	Number of occurrences	Per cent	Number of texts
Professional	364	0.3978	30
Education	140	0.1530	15
Educational	126	0.1377	9
Skills	83	0.0910	20
Profession	81	0.0885	19
Knowledge	73	0.0798	23
Compliance	72	0.0787	12
Duties	67	0.0732	18
Accurately	48	0.0525	22
Training	48	0.0525	15
Qualifications	45	0.0492	10
Accuracy	41	0.0448	16
Certification	36	0.0393	9
Competence	36	0.0393	11
Experience	33	0.0361	16
Qualified	32	0.0350	10
Professionals	29	0.0317	10
Professionalism	21	0.0229	14
Proficiency	17	0.0186	7
Professionally	17	0.0186	7
Skilled	7	0.0076	6
Experienced	7	0.0076	6

**Table 3.** The words found in the corpus, related to relational/interactional aspects of behaviour

Words	Number of occurrences	Per cent	Number of texts
Appropriate	122	0.1333	23
Respect	48	0.0525	17
Appearance	43	0.0470	13
Politely	11	0.0120	1
Attire	6	0.0066	4
Courteous	5	0.0055	3
Respectful	5	0.0055	5
Unobtrusiveness	4	0.0044	2
Amicably	3	0.0033	3
Discreetly	3	0.0033	3
Respected	3	0.0033	2
Respectfully	3	0.0033	1



In the analysed corpus of codes of conduct, the principles that interpreters should follow can be divided into three groups:

1. Ethical tenets:

privacy, confidentiality, impartiality, detachment, objectivity, accuracy, avoidance of personal gain, avoidance of conflict of interests, avoidance of prejudice, refraining from providing advice or personal opinions, integrity, independence.

2. Competence tenets:

- interpreting to the best of one’s ability;
- rendering the message faithfully by conveying the content and spirit of what is being communicated;
- developing one’s professional knowledge and skills;
- a good command of both languages including specialist terminology, current idioms and dialects;
- keeping up to date with the relevant procedures of the particular area in which interpreting is performed.

3. Relational tenets:

- showing respect for clients and colleagues;
- being polite;
- being supportive;
- being unobtrusive;
- dignity;
- facilitating communication;
- careful choice of attire, appropriate for the particular assignment;
- establishing a compassionate but professional relationship with the client;
- being on time and prepared for all assignments;
- professional solidarity.

Professional conduct of the translator (and interpreter) can be characterized by a certain ethics. Interpreting is “an activity that in itself is intrinsically ethical” (Baker & Maier, 2011, p. 3). Baker and Maier (2011, p. 11) claim that the relationship between ethics and the translating and interpreting profession is “a relationship in which ethical decisions can rarely, if ever, be made a priori but must be understood and taught as an integral and challenging element of one’s work.” The other important aspects of the interpreter’s conduct are the interpreting competence, “professional skills and knowledge required for the specific interpreting situation” (NAD-RID), and polite and tactful behaviour towards others (“Standards of Conduct and Decorum” (AUSIT)).

## 5. The interpreter's face

As has been already mentioned, interpreting encounters are a special case of social interaction, both due to their social and dialogic character and their organization (cf. Wadensjö, 1998). Interpreters are aware that, besides coordinating and relaying the facework of primary participants, they have to avoid jeopardizing the confidence of these participants in them as translators and coordinators. Cecilia Wadensjö (1998), analysing such encounters (liaison interpreting), uses the theoretical framework of Erving Goffman's work on social encounters and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of language and communication. She maintains that

an interpreter's typical self-image is deeply influenced by the partly codified normative role, to use a concept from Goffman (1961), that is, what a performer of the role normally thinks she ought to do when she does a good job. One frequently used metaphor for the interpreter's job is the copying-machine. Another is the 'telephone': the interpreter is thought of, and thinks of herself as a channel, an instrument conveying information, someone who affects the words, messages, and utterances of the monolingual parties in a merely technical sense. (Wadensjö, 1995, p. 116)

The role of facework in interpreting was also investigated by Bente Jacobsen (2008), who analysed a prosecutor's interpreter-mediated questioning of a defendant in a criminal trial at a Danish district court. Like any type of social interaction, this triadic speech event is a face-threatening situation, and the interpreter's task is to protect the primary participants' face by modifying face-threatening utterances.

Interpreting is an inherently face-threatening activity. While attending to the face of the primary participants, the interpreter has his/her own face to attend to as a professional (Jacobsen, 2008). For the interpreter, this situation is much more complicated than an average social interaction as he/she has to take into consideration both "structural (language) constraints and interpersonal (ritual) constraints" (Monacelli, 2009, p. 108). The complexity of the situation is even greater due to the diversity of roles performed by interaction participants and different types of relationships between them.

Individuals entering into social interaction with others become, as Arundale (2006) claims, *persons-in-relation-to-other-persons*. However, while assuming certain social identities and performing certain social roles, they do not stop being individuals. Face is not exclusively a property of the emergent relationship between interactants. It is also a property specific to the individuals involved. An individual acting as an interpreter can be perceived as:

- a person-in-relationship-to-other-persons (irrespective of their roles),
- an interpreter-in-relation-to-clients,
- an interpreter-in-relation-to-colleagues,
- an individual human being.

The four aspects of the individual's self constitute the basis for the interpreter's face. Like the face of any other human being, and any other professional, it depends on the values and norms vital to the group he/she belongs to, that is professional interpreters. These values and norms, which have been described in the interpreters' code of conduct, determine the attributes every interpreter should have.

Among the socially relevant qualities of the interpreter's self-image, by analogy to the main categories of tenets included in the interpreters' codes of conduct, we can distinguish three groups of attributes:

- attributes tied to moral conduct (e.g., adherence to the code of professional ethics);
- attributes tied to a position in a social setting (e.g., professional competence of the interpreter);
- attributes tied to interpersonal skills and facework competence (e.g., coordinating/mediating skills).

The attributes tied to the interpreter's moral/ethical conduct are culture-general, and the majority of them are important for face judgements also in other social contexts. The second group consists of attributes specific to this particular profession – interpreting. Professional competence of the interpreter involves knowledge and translating/interpreting skills indispensable for acting as a mediator in cross-linguistic communication. The last group of attributes important for face judgements includes interpersonal skills and facework competence, which can be characterized in terms of three dimensions (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998, p. 200):

- cultural knowledge which would help the individual to understand other people's cultural perspectives;
- mindfulness in simultaneous attendance to one's own and the other's assumptions, cognitions and emotions;
- “communication skills in managing self's and other's face-related concerns,” such as identity- and relational-management issues.

An individual competent in facework can be evaluated as behaving appropriately and effectively and as being able to adapt to problematic interpersonal situations. The relative value of all these attributes varies across cultures and depends on the hierarchy of values, social norms and social organization existing in a given culture. Mediating the communication between primary participants, the interpreter has to engage in facework, which can pose problems due to culture differences in patterns of behaviour, politeness and social relations.

Performing the role of the interpreter, the individual is obliged to maintain his/her own face as well as primary participants'. This is a condition of social interaction and successful interpreting (Goffman, 1967). The interpreter's Professional Face is a complex construct. To maintain it in interpreting contexts, the individual has to convince the others that he/she is endowed with these three categories of attributes.

## 6. Student interpreters, ethics of interpreting and face

To find out what are the most important attributes of the interpreter's self-image according to interpreters themselves, I have analysed the results of the questionnaire carried out among the student translators. The questionnaire used in the present research consisted of open-ended questions which were designed to elicit data concerning situations which are threatening the interpreter's face.

Responding to the questions concerning situations threatening the interpreter's face, the students mentioned only threats to Prestige Face and threats to Relational Face. A person's moral integrity does not attract much attention in everyday social interaction. Behaviour in accordance with the moral code, by means of which the person maintains his/her Moral Face, is what is expected. It constitutes an unmarked type of facework, and as such it is hard to observe. No student from the group responding to the questionnaire mentioned any situation in which the interpreter's Moral Face would be threatened. It must be mentioned that, having attended the interpreting course, all the students were familiar with the main tenets of the interpreters' code of conduct and the necessity to adhere to them during interpreting. Lack of examples of Moral Face threatening situations in their responses may be explained by the fact that, as young inexperienced interpreters, all the time they had to cope with lack of professional competence. All of them focused on the situations of self-face threat in which the interpreter shows inadequate interpreting competence that can lead to his/her face damage. Taking such a perspective, they completely neglected the ethical aspect of their interpreting activity. During short interviews afterwards, the majority of respondents claimed that they did not even think about unethical behaviour as another potential face-threat.

**Table 4.** Situations threatening the interpreter's face

Aspect of face	Face-threatening situation	Mentioned by the respondents [per cent]
Moral Face	–	–
Prestige Face	making a factual error	100
	changing the sense of the text	80
	incomprehension of the text to be interpreted	63
	lacking words	57
	forgetting a key word	54
	making a grammatical error	54
	error correction	46
	uttering unfinished sentences	40
	long silences	37
	lacking fluency	9
hesitation	6	
Relational Face	nervousness	97
	inability to cope with stress	91
	inability to control one's voice	66
	stammering	43
	speaking in a hoarse voice	34
	inability to focus attention on what is to be interpreted	9
	slovenly appearance	3

Table 4 shows the most frequently mentioned situations which can threaten the interpreter's face. As might have been expected, the most frequently mentioned threats were those which concerned the interpreters' Prestige Face. Prestige Face, like Moral Face, is a result of some actions and choices of the person as well as of his/her purposeful self-presentation. It is concerned with the person's social status, rank, reputation, competence and skills (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska, 2010). As the respondents were to ponder over their Professional Face, the aspect of Prestige Face that they concentrated on involved their interpreting competence and skills. It was Prestige Face that all the respondents were mainly afraid of losing. The majority of the situations mentioned were those of self-face threat type.

Thinking about situations threatening Relational Face, the respondents mentioned only self-face threats, the majority of them resulted from the violation of the interpreters' code of conduct. Some of them could be interpreted as a breach of norms of politeness. Others resulted from the interpreter's individual personality traits and unsuccessful self-presentation.

## 7. Conclusions

The aim of the study was to analyse the interpreter's Professional Face, its ethical aspect in particular. To find out what constitutes the content of the interpreter's face, I have analysed a corpus of interpreters' codes of conduct. The data gathered in this way have been interpreted within the framework of the Cultural Face Model. It turned out that the culture-general model of face, consisting of three main aspects (moral, social and relational), can be applied not only to culture-specific, but also to profession-specific patterns of behaviour.

The interpreters' code of conduct does not differ much from social morality and social norms. The ideal interpreter's Professional Face has a lot in common with the so-called "good face" every participant of social interaction claims to have. What makes it different is its Prestige aspect, in which attributes related to the interpreter's competence dominate. The interpreter's Prestige Face, related to his/her position and occupation, unlike Moral Face and Relational Face, is mainly profession-specific. It is created according to the hierarchy of values and priorities relevant to this profession. The analysis of the codes has shown that for interpreters Morality Face is as important as Prestige Face, as a good interpreter is the one that can be trusted. Maintaining Relational Face is a "tricky" enterprise for the interpreter, as he/she mediates communication between parties speaking two different languages and belonging to two different cultures.

There is, however, a difference between the ideal – the interpreter's Professional Face, emerging from what the codes say, and the real – the Professional Face actually claimed by the young interpreters. This goes in line with what Wadensjö found out:

As Goffman (1961) suggests, exploring a social role, you naturally look at the normative role expectations associated with this particular role. However, this will give you information only on one aspect. Ideas about normativity towards which an interpreter orients herself when working is one thing. How her social role is actually lived, i.e. carried out in practice, is another thing. (Wadensjö, 1995, p. 115)

In the ideal Professional Face, the moral aspect is in the foreground, and almost as important as the competence aspect. In the real Professional Face, the moral aspect is nonexistent, and what only matters is the interpreter's competence, constituting an element of Prestige Face. In both cases, the relational aspect of Professional Face is equally vital, although it is of secondary importance in comparison to its competence aspect. The content of Relational Face, however, differs: The codes of conduct focus on the other – the client, while the young interpreters focus on the self and self-presentation.

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