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Community Interpreters in Finland: A Heterogeneous Community Divided by Ethnicity

Simo Määttä

This paper explores whether public-service or community interpreters[1] constitute a cohesive community in Finland. Data includes recordings of semi-structured interviews and notes from a panel discussion with community interpreters. Nexus analysis identifies two discourses as uniting sub-communities but dividing the community as a whole: education and ethnicity. The ethnic divide, intersecting with other discourses and separating factors, is a key issue to be resolved for a more tightly knit professional community to be formed.

Keywords: community interpreting, public service interpreting, nexus analysis, professionalization, Community Studies

1. Introduction

Issues faced by Finnish community interpreters (or public-service interpreters) today include the quality of community interpreting, the deterioration of working conditions and decreasing remuneration. As most community interpreters are not active in professional associations, it is difficult to tackle these issues. In fact, the existence of a full-fledged professional community is questionable. The only community to which all community interpreters adhere appears to be a rather loose community of practice. Community interpreters in Finland engage in similar practices: they facilitate communication between service providers and migrants in public-service environments such as health-care centers and hospitals, day-care centers and schools, social work offices, or different situations related to the reception of asylum seekers. Specialization in just branch of community interpreting is rare in Finland; besides, most community interpreters also work as legal interpreters.[2]

In this paper, I will query the existence of a professional community among public service interpreters in Finland through data consisting of notes and recordings of semi-structured interviews with 10 community interpreters and notes taken in a panel discussion with 6 community interpreters at the 13th Symposium on Translation and Interpreting held at the University of Helsinki in April 2015. First, I explain the theoretical and methodological framework, i.e. nexus analysis, and examine statistical data related to recent migration patterns and community interpreting in Finland. Second, I briefly discuss the issues that the informants identified as reasons why community interpreters should have a more cohesive community. Subsequently, I analyze two discourses uniting sub-communities among community interpreters but dividing the community as a whole: education and ethnicity. To conclude, I suggest that the ethnic divide functions as a hidden discourse intertwining with all other discourses related to communities among public-service interpreters. It forms a key issue to be resolved if the goal is to form a more cohesive community. The research aspires to identify both possible explanations for the current situation and goals for further action.

2. Nexus Analysis and the Sociological Turn in Translation and Interpreting Studies

The theoretical background of my analysis stems from nexus analysis, developed by Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon.[3] This framework has its roots in critical discourse analysis and critical theory, linguistic anthropology, interactive sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, and social psychology. Previously, the approach has been used to analyze, for example, indigenous minority languages in the classroom, language shift, and the dominance of majority languages, as well as social issues such as youth unemployment and disability.[4] In addition, Kaisa Koskinen has employed the approach in her ethnography of EU translators.[5]

While community is an essentially contested concept, most notions of community in sociology and anthropology stress the same defining characteristics: membership, shared practices (including organized interaction), shared values, and sometimes also territory and cultural similarity.[6] Nexus analysis departs from such notions by focusing on the interaction between discourse and action and argues that shared practices do not automatically imply membership in a community. Thus, while nexus analysis is widely used within approaches such as critical discourse analysis, it does not purport to study only language or language use. Rather, it emphasizes language and other semiotic systems as an action-mediating tool.

This departure from notions of community commonly used in anthropology or Community Studies is quite visible in Ron Scollon's discussion of the notion of *community of practice*.[7] According to Penelope Eckert and Sally McDonell-Gilet,[8] a community of practice is different from a traditional community in that it is defined both by membership criteria and by the practice following from that membership. Engagement in such a practice is mutual and goal-oriented and includes beliefs, values, power relations, and ways of doing things and talking. These are created, maintained, and developed through social interaction. In contrast, Scollon argues that the concept of community of practice is largely based on the notion of membership stemming from mutual practice, therefore implying phenomena of inclusion and exclusion.[9] According to the Scollons, membership is not an inevitable outcome of shared practices. They propose the term *nexus of practice* in order to account for shared practices in which "the historical trajectories of people, places, discourses, and objects come together to enable some action." [10] This shared social action subsequently alters the historical trajectories that take part in the action and emanate from it.

The nexus of practice can therefore be conceptualized as the intersection of the participants' *historical bodies* ("history of personal experience"[11]), interaction order (in the Goffmanian understanding of the notion[12]), and discourses enabling the action. In this context, discourse means both language as a social practice in general, as well as meaning-making practices related to particular forms of action.[13]

The goal of nexus analysis is to identify, expose, and analyze relevant discourses that are either explicitly foregrounded or implicit and invisible. The inquiry starts with the *identification of a social issue* within the nexus of practice and related action, i.e. "a moment in time and space in which the historical bodies and the interaction order of people and the discourse in place intersect."[14] At this stage, the presence of the researcher becomes visible and he or she becomes part of the nexus of practice: research and participant activities merge.[15] Subsequently, the researcher

navigates the nexus of action by mapping and circumferencing it with tools adopted from suitable methodological traditions such as critical discourse analysis and ethnography. Eventually, the researcher may attempt to change the nexus of practice. These steps do not necessarily follow this order, nor do all studies necessarily include all the steps.[16]

Due to the foregrounding of embodiment and human bodies as a depository of memories, experiences, and schemata, Scollon and Scollon prefer the notion of the historical body to account for a phenomenon that Pierre Bourdieu has called *habitus*, i.e. the set of habits, abilities, and dispositions which function as a physical materialization of one's life experiences[17] (in Bourdieu's words, "structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures"[18]). Bourdieu's notion of habitus and adjacent concepts such as field, symbolic capital, and the logic of practice have been widely used to re-introduce a socio-historical perspective into Translation Studies.[19] Indeed, habitus has been regarded as a way of conceptualizing the mechanisms by which individual translators and their practices embody translation norms.[20] Applications in the study of community interpreting include Moira Inghilleri's study on asylum interpreting.[21] However, the potential of Bourdieu's theorizations, habitus in particular, has also been criticized on the grounds of their perceived determinism and failure to acknowledge the diversity of individual dispositions. Drawing on identity research,[22] Rakefet Sela-Sheffy responds to this criticism by combining a theorization based on the notion of habitus with the concept of *identity negotiation*. This addendum allows for the consideration of the diversity of translators' social backgrounds, working conditions, and personal and professional dispositions.[23]

My study examines the reasons why community interpreters in Finland do or do not form a community by identifying and analyzing key social issues that emerge from action shared by individuals. Focusing on *discourses* circulating among individuals therefore appears to be a more suitable choice than concentrating on allegedly neutral categories such as "profession" or "occupation"[24] or on individual identities or relatively stable dispositions determining the structure of the habitus. Nexus analysis as a theoretical model is thus justified both by the nature of the data and data-collection methods and the focus of the study: analysis of factors that explain different role behaviors through the actors' historical bodies, and identification and analysis of discourses that reify similarities and differences among individuals who could potentially form a community. Nexus analysis provides not only a theoretical model but also a coherent framework for the analysis of diverse data through multiple methods. In particular, it stresses the importance of ethnography, auto-ethnography, and participant observation by emphasizing the active presence of the researcher. As I will explain in the next sub-section, these forms of knowledge collection constitute an important foundation for the analysis of panel-discussion and interview data in this study.

3. Identifying and Navigating the Nexus of Practice

The present study is a continuation of my earlier research on discourses and language ideologies in the context of community interpreting in Finland.[25] The mapping of the field and the identification of the social issues explored here have extended over a long period consisting of both community-interpreting practice and research. I have worked as a community interpreter in the greater Helsinki area since 2004. In addition, I translate texts related to community interpreting and am a member of

the Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters. Moreover, I teach translation and interpreting at the University of Helsinki and have trained community and court interpreters in other institutions. Through these activities, I have been able to map community interpreting in Finland extensively, identify potential issues, and create large networks including different actors of the field.

The first link between theory and an active engagement in the nexus of practice was the organization of a panel discussion at the 12th Symposium on Translation and Interpreting held at the University of Tampere in 2014. These annual symposia gather mostly translation and interpreting studies scholars and educators but also translators, interpreters, and representatives of businesses and associations in the field. The general theme of the 2014 symposium was "Myths of Translation and Interpreting," and I invited researchers, interpreter trainers, representatives of interpreting agencies, and community interpreters to the panel which explored the role and agency of community interpreters. At the 2015 symposium, held at the University of Helsinki and focusing on "Communities of Translation and Interpreting," I organized a panel discussion with a group of 6 community interpreters in order to explore whether community interpreters form a cohesive community and whether indeed they should do so. The audience of approximately 50 persons consisted of interpreters, interpreter trainers, researchers, students, and representatives of interpreting agencies and professional associations.

The data discussed in the following sections of this paper come from notes taken during this panel (duration 2 hours) and from the notes and recordings of follow-up interviews (mean duration 1.5 hours) with 10 interpreters. All informants had Finnish as either their A or B language. Other languages they interpreted from and into included Arabic, Bulgarian, Dari, English, Estonian, Farsi, French, German, different varieties of Kurdish, Lithuanian, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Swedish, Thai, and Turkish; most had more than one B language. In the panel, there were three interpreters of Finnish descent and three interpreters of non-Finnish descent. Among the interpreters I interviewed, 4 were of Finnish descent and 5 of foreign descent. One was of both Finnish and non-Finnish descent.

In addition to the core data described above, I have analyzed statistical information provided by Statistics Finland, interpreter agencies, the City of Helsinki, and the Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters. I have also analyzed other forms of related data that have emerged without my direct intervention: online discussions in the closed discussion forum of Finnish interpreters on Facebook (237 members on March 6, 2016; individual threads are read by between 80 and 205 members), notes taken during a discussion forum organized by the Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters on the topic of procurement practices in community interpreting on February 10, 2016, and notes taken at a meeting initiated by individual community interpreters in order to start a separate association of community interpreters on March 7, 2016 in Helsinki. Therefore, the assessment of the field and identification of the issues to be analyzed were performed as a participant observer (community interpreter, researcher, and interpreter activist) and combined with background statistics and additional participant observation data. Core data was derived from a panel discussion and follow-up, semi-structured interviews with interpreters representing a variety of working languages.

All informants knew my position in the field in multiple roles: interpreter, educator, and teacher. In order to protect the privacy of the subjects, no detailed information is provided regarding the language combinations or other factors through which the informants could be identified and linked to items extracted from the data and presented in this paper. Thus, I have limited the number of direct quotations by the informants, as my focus is on topics that emerge from the interviews and discourses that can be identified when similar topics surface in different interviews.

4. Community Interpreting in Finland

Community interpreting in Finland is based on various legal provisions. Asylum seekers have the right to interpreting services at all stages of the process. In addition, interpreting is always provided for persons facing refusal of entry into the country or deportation and in procedures initiated by the authorities. The law also stipulates that health and social service users are entitled to information in a language they can understand. Today, the state and municipalities mostly procure interpreter services from interpreter agencies through calls for bids. There is no official registry or mandatory certification for community interpreters in Finland. As a result, anyone can work as a community interpreter.

The birth of the field corresponds with the demographic shift that occurred at the beginning of the 1990s, when Finland became a destination for migrants. In 1990, only approximately 25,000 people, i.e. 0.50% of the population, spoke languages other than "national" or "traditional" languages (Finnish, Swedish, one of the three Sámi languages traditionally spoken in Finland, Finnish Romani language, or Finnish or Finnish-Swedish Sign Language). At the end of 2015, the proportion of first-language speakers of foreign languages was 6%, i.e. 329,562 persons,[26] and there were 339,925 residents of foreign extraction.[27] In addition, between 1990 and 2014, approximately 100,000 such residents had been naturalized (over 8,000 in both 2014 and 2015). The migration continues and intensifies: in 2015, Finland received a record number of 32,476 asylum seekers, which will most likely trigger major changes in statistics related to the languages of Finland, as the largest groups of asylum seekers came from Iraq, Somalia, Syria, and Afghanistan.[28] According to the most recent official statistics from December 2015, the most widely-spoken foreign first languages were Russian (72,436 speakers), Estonian (48,087), Somali (17,871), English (17,784), Arabic (16,713), Kurdish (11,271), Chinese (10,722), Albanian (9,233), Farsi (8,754), Thai (8,582), Vietnamese (8,273), Turkish (7,082), Spanish (7,025), and German (6,168). In these statistics, a person can only have one mother tongue. The mother tongue of 651 persons was unknown and 6,547 persons reported a mother tongue that was not approved for official statistics.[29] Issues related to the names of the languages mentioned above will be discussed below.

In the greater Helsinki area, the population speaking foreign languages as their first language is proportionally more important than in other urban areas: in the City of Helsinki (population 620,795 at the end of 2015), about 13.5% of the overall population, and up to 25% in certain districts, has a foreign language as their mother tongue. Almost half of the foreign-speaking population of Finland lives in the Helsinki metropolitan area (population 1.1 million) and the proportion of speakers of languages other than the traditional national languages is estimated to reach 21%, and up to 28% in the core metropolitan area, by 2030.[30]

The list of most widely spoken foreign languages corresponds roughly to the list of the most important languages in community interpreting. Thus, one of the largest community-interpreting agencies in the greater Helsinki area reports that the most important languages in community interpreting today are Russian, Somali, Arabic, and Sorani. The yearly number of hours interpreted through this agency is 70,000.[31] Another major agency, which manages approximately 1,700 community-interpreting assignments every week throughout Finland,[32] reports that demand for interpreters of languages such as Somali, Arabic, Sorani, and Dari has grown exponentially in recent months.[33]

On the other hand, the total number of community interpreters in Finland can only be estimated. Since interpreters often work for several different agencies, numbers given by the agencies do not provide an accurate picture. There is also the issue of separating part-time interpreters from full-time interpreters. Besides, many interpreters – court and police interpreters in particular – still work without the mediating services of an agency. Consequently, figures provided by agencies do not reflect the full picture. In addition, community interpreting is an essentially contested concept: it is not generally agreed whether court interpreters are in fact also community interpreters. And finally, since community interpreting and court interpreting are not regulated professions in Finland, there are no public registers of community, police, and court interpreters. One of my informants suggested that the number of "more or less professional interpreters" could be close to 1,000. The total number of community interpreters is probably much higher.

Nonetheless, numbers given by interpreting agencies provide some clues about the number of interpreters of different languages. One of the major agencies in the greater Helsinki area reported in March 2014 that interpreting of Somali accounted for approximately 17% of the assignments, followed by Russian (also 17%), Arabic (14%), Sorani and Albanian (both 5%), Vietnamese and English (both 4%), Estonian, Turkish, Farsi, Mandarin, Dari, French, and Thai (all 3% of the total number of interpreted hours).[34] When compared with the population statistics presented above, these figures speak to the diversity of foreign-language speaking populations. However, the number of speakers of a language does not necessarily mean that this language is proportionately as important within community interpreting.

Several factors may explain such discrepancies. While the difference between Dari and Farsi, or Mandarin and Cantonese, or Sorani and other varieties of Kurdish is important for the speakers and therefore also for interpreting agencies and community interpreters, official statistics acknowledge only Farsi, Chinese, and Kurdish. Other explanations include the prevalent migration pattern (e.g. asylum, work, studies, or marriage), the proportion of first-generation vs. second-generation speakers (e.g. some migrations are still on-going whereas others have stagnated), the ability to learn Finnish (e.g. the level of education upon arrival among different migrant groups, or exposure to Finnish as in the case of Estonian, a language closely related with Finnish), or the political and social constellation of the language in question (e.g. lingua franca vs. vernacular). For example, while there are more speakers of Turkish (7,082 in 2015), Spanish (7,025), German (6,168), or Polish (4,794) than French (3,878), French is far more important as a language of community interpreting.

Hence, the discrepancy between the number of speakers and the number of interpreted hours correlates to some extent with the capacity for integration into Finnish society, a capacity that is partially contingent upon ethnic background: while many migrants need community interpreters at a certain point at the beginning of the integration process, some migrants need them more and for a longer period of time than others. Besides, the demand for interpreters of a given language can be quite high even though the number of speakers residing in Finland is relatively low. Among other things, this is due to the fact that speakers of certain languages are over-represented in specific types of international criminal activities: their initial intention is not to stay in the country. Indeed, it is erroneous to use the term "migrant" for all persons needing interpreter services.

5. Reasons in Favor of a More Cohesive Interpreting Community

Most informants argued that community interpreters should form a more tightly knit community. The most important factors the informants identified as reasons why a more cohesive community is necessary were 1) peer support to counter vicarious traumatization, 2) enhanced respect of professional ethics through a more cohesive sense of shared values and ethics among the interpreters, 3) improvement of the status of the profession among those who are not interpreters, and 4) financial matters.

Many informants identified trauma as an issue that could be reduced through a tighter community. Indeed, trauma interpreting and vicarious traumatization surface in practically all discussion panels, training sessions, and interviews with interpreters regardless of the main topic of the meeting. Trauma has also surfaced in the online discussion group of community interpreters and is a common topic of conversation among colleagues. Thus, one of my informants said that she would like there to be more communality and tighter communities among the interpreters so that they could receive peer support and talk about the psychologically difficult narratives they interpret and the frustration they feel in transmitting painful experiences without being able to take an active role in the situation. The emotional and ethical stress described by this informant corresponds to the accounts of mental health interpreters and the need for counseling and supervision discussed in the research literature[35] and to the expressed need for supervision, counseling, and peer support identified in other studies.[36] However, many informants stated that only a fellow interpreter can understand what interpreters go through and that interpreters do not always find outside assistance very useful. In fact, one informant specified that even a lengthy psychotherapeutic treatment does not prevent vicarious traumatization when interpreting accounts of traumatic experiences that are very similar to the interpreter's own experiences. [37]

Another reason why informants would like the interpreting body to form a tighter community stems from ethical considerations that have been discussed extensively in the literature.[38] Some informants claimed that there are interpreters who do not follow the rules and the ethical code and that it would be necessary to form a real community so that interpreters would share the same work ethics and values. Another informant pointed out that interpreters are not loyal towards their colleagues and defame and belittle them constantly. However, the informant declared that the problem is more salient among conference interpreters because they never work alone: there is always a fellow interpreter ready to monitor, assess, and eventually criticize the performance.

A related problem concerns the public image and status of community interpreters. Some informants found it difficult to fight for a better professional status when there is such a wide range of interpreters, each with their own work habits and ethics. According to one informant, the situation is deteriorating rapidly as the demand for interpreters of languages spoken by new asylum seekers increases exponentially and agencies have great difficulty in finding qualified interpreters. Since this informant was worried about the fact that service providers are not aware of the problem, the concern about the quality of interpreting among colleagues therefore appears to cause ethical stress related to linguistic injustice.[39]

Internationally, the importance of conference and business-liaison interpreting has decreased in recent years, mostly due to the widespread use of English as a lingua franca. As a result, many conference and business interpreters have been forced to reinvent themselves professionally. Some have found a new career in teaching. Others have sought work in the growing sector of legal interpreting and some have also started working in other domains of community interpreting, such as asylum, social work, and health care.[40] Since conference and business interpreters are used to higher remuneration and a stable status, these structural changes have accentuated problems related to professionalization and financial issues. However, one informant stated that community interpreters prefer to make a difference in their work rather than gaining more money in a professional environment that they find less socially and ethically rewarding.

Such views echo Franz Pöchhacker's characterization of community interpreting as the "Third World" of interpreting, as opposed to the "First World" of conference interpreting.[41] In addition, these views are reminiscent of corollaries identified by Sela-Sheffy between certain literary translators' and community interpreters' ethos as cultural brokers.[42] In contrast, other informants called for more community action in order to stop the development that interpreters see as reflecting unfair procurement and tendering practices, in which agencies lower interpreter remuneration and other benefits and give assignments to cheap amateur interpreters and students without considering quality and credentials, while at the same time winning bids by emphasizing the quality of their interpreters.

6. Discourses Reifying Differences: Education and Training

In the analysis of the data, education emerged as a complex discourse, characterized by strong antagonisms that actively reify differences among interpreters. The educational backgrounds of community interpreters are extremely diverse. Some have a university degree from a Translation Studies program at a Finnish university. These programs, which concentrate on translation rather than on interpreting, offer degrees in languages of European origin: English, German, Swedish, French, and Russian (as well as Spanish and Italian at the University of Turku). Language programs without a translation track offer mostly European languages as well, although certain non-European languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, and Swahili can be studied at the University of Helsinki. Interpreters may also have a language-studies degree from another country.

While the most important languages of community interpreting are not taught at all or not widely taught at the university-level B.A. and M.A. programs in Translation and Interpreting Studies or

philology, there has been some attempt to provide non-degree interpreting-training programs and degree programs through adult-education centers and universities of applied sciences.

The first serious community interpreting course, offered by the Continuing Education Center of the University of Helsinki, started in 1998. This course was aimed at training interpreters in a situation of severe shortage and did not lead to a degree. Since 1998, it has also been possible to take a professional qualification exam in community interpreting. According to statistics provided by the National Agency for Education, a total of 367 persons representing 35 different language pairs passed this exam between 1998 and 2013.The number of persons that have passed this qualification has been between 22 and 23, annually, in recent years (22 in 2014). In other words, 389 interpreters had passed this certification test by the end of 2014. Most had attended a training program provided by one of the four adult-education centers accredited to organize preparatory programs for the test.[43] The duration of the program is typically one year, and the program combines distance learning and contact teaching.

The Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diak), with campuses in Helsinki and Turku, has offered a B.A. program in community interpreting of spoken languages since 2011. The duration of the program is 3.5 years; 24 students graduated in 2014. As only students with Finnish as their A or B language can study in this program, sufficient Finnish skills are required. Other eligible A and B languages differ from one entering class to another: Arabic, Farsi, Somali, Sorani, and Thai have been offered frequently. The program that started in fall 2016 accepted students speaking Arabic, Dari or Farsi, Mandarin, Sorani, Somali, Thai, Turkish, and Vietnamese.[44]

In addition, since 2014, there has been a training program for legal interpreters in connection with the implementation of the official register of legal interpreters. The first 15 legal interpreters to have participated in the preparatory program offered by the Tampere Adult Education Center graduated in spring 2016. Interpreters of Arabic, Estonian, and Russian were eligible for the first course. Languages available for the second course were English, Farsi, and Russian.[45]

When figures presented in the preceding paragraphs are compared with statistics regarding the most widely spoken foreign languages and the most important languages in community interpreting, it is safe to assume that large numbers of community interpreters have only received a short orientation or ad hoc training or no training at all. Existing research literature also supports this estimation. For example, in her ethnographic study on 8 female Somali interpreters' perceptions of their work, Hanna Koskelin discovered that most of them had been recruited after a short orientation of a couple of hours. Only one interpreter had sought interpreter training first. Sometimes, recruiters tested the interpreters' Somali skills, sometimes their Finnish skills.[46]

Similar findings emerge from my data as well. Thus, several informants had not been trained or had been trained on the spot. Many pointed out that a significant proportion of community interpreters are self-taught, which results in working habits and techniques that depart both from basic interpreting skills and professional ethics. An insufficient knowledge of the function, role, and responsibility of the interpreter was also mentioned, corresponding with the characteristics Cecilia Wadensjö has identified as typical of self-taught interpreters.[47] For example, one informant declared that self-taught interpreters tend to use the third person when interpreting the speech of others, which leads to confusion. Two informants complained that self-taught interpreters often lack

solidarity towards their colleagues and tend to disparage them. The correlation between lack of training and lack of professionalism has been acknowledged in several studies. María Aguilar-Solano's study on volunteer interpreters in Southern Spain revealed that interpreters in these settings work more as social workers than interpreters.[48] Similar patterns have been identified in studies about Italian "language mediator" interpreters.[49] Most Somali-Finnish interpreters interviewed by Koskelin stated that they do not limit themselves to interpreting but also help their clients, who belong to the same ethnic group, in other ways.[50]

Those informants who had attended a community-interpreting program or who had sought to develop their professional skills through continuing-education courses strongly emphasized the importance of proper training and continuing education and considered it to be the professional duty of every interpreter. In general, informants who had studied translation and interpreting at a university or community interpreting at a university of applied sciences or an adult-education center had a strong sense of professionalism (based on what Holly Mikkelson has identified as "an accepted body of knowledge"[51]) and described interpreter identity and the ability to resolve moral dilemmas and work ethically as assets gained through education.

Many informants who had studied interpreting in the vocational-education sector mentioned that university degrees are disproportionately appreciated although university programs do not focus on community interpreting. Those interpreters who had neither formal interpreter training nor a degree from a language department strongly challenged the importance of interpreter training or any language education. Thus, one informant argued that their skills based on 20 years of experience as an interpreter and a thorough knowledge of each possible situation were more developed than those of a university graduate. This view echoes surveys showing that, while training as such may be regarded as valuable, many community interpreters do not value academic degrees and tend to have their own definitions of professionalism.[52] The same informant said that practical experience is particularly valuable in terms of the most important professional skill a community interpreter can possess, i.e. what this informant referred to as "moral competence." Many other informants also emphasized the importance of informal on-the-job training as preparation for the unexpected and the changing situations and circumstances that are typical in public service interpreting. One informant argued that it is often simply impossible to find a trained interpreter. In such a situation, training is not the most important qualification: "things need to be done and business handled," no matter the interpreter's interpreting skills or Finnish proficiency.

During the panel discussion, some representatives of interpreting agencies also complained about the fact that although training is offered, it is difficult to convince interpreters to attend training sessions: for example, interpreters may say that they are not interested unless they are paid for the training. One phenomenon that many had observed is that training sessions are popular among the most competent interpreters whereas those who would actually need training more acutely are not interested in attending them. Similar phenomena have been identified in existing literature.[53]

7. Discourses Reifying Differences: Ethnicity

The divisions that are visible in the educational discourse among community interpreters intersect with the discourse on ethnicity in complex and recurrent ways. While community interpreting can

be characterized as a thick space of cultural interaction,[54] the ethnic and racial dimensions of interpreting communities are rarely acknowledged in public discourse. In this data, ethnicity emerges as a relatively camouflaged key discourse encompassing sub-discourses such as linguistic itinerary, work trajectory, and professionalization. In this succinct analysis, the complexity of the issue is of course simplified: not all interpreters can even determine whether they are of Finnish or non-Finnish descent. There are also significant differences between and within different ethnic groups: the ways in which each ethnically marked constellation intersects with other factors is unique.

Linguistic itineraries and work trajectories are closely linked with training and education. For example, one informant characterized the difference between languages taught at universities and the languages most needed in community interpreting as a difference between "strong and weak languages": while many languages of European origin can be studied within the philology or translation and interpreting studies programs of the universities, there are no such programs available for the study of the languages for which the demand is highest in public service interpreting, such as languages with traditional speaker areas in the Middle East or in Africa. As a result, interpreters of "weak" languages are typically migrants who have either arrived in Finland as adults or grown up in Finland in a bilingual environment. Most of them have no background in language studies and are not trained to be interpreters. According to the informants, most community interpreters in Finland belong to this group.

Comparisons between statistical information about the number of people speaking different languages, the importance of different languages in community interpreting, and the languages offered by different institutions training translators and interpreters also indicate that this is probably the case (there are no official data regarding the ethnic background of interpreters). However, while languages such as Somali or Dari could be quite easily categorized as "weak" languages in Finland although they are among the most important languages in community interpreting, the position of many other languages is not so clear. For example, while several universities offer degree programs in Russian, many interpreters of Russian have a migrant background with varying degrees of formal interpreter training. As a result, Russian appears to be both a "weak" and a "strong" language in Finland.

The difference between "strong" and "weak" languages also correlates with differences related to the function and valuation of the interpreter profession in a person's life. Previous studies have shown that interpreters who come from migrant communities do not always consider community interpreting as their real profession and that they move on to other occupations as soon as they get the opportunity. Examples include Hanna Snellman's ethnographic study among migrants from Northern Finland in Gothenburg, Sweden: public-service interpreting structures emerged informally from the community and interpreting was a source of secondary income for those migrants who had superior Swedish skills.[55] Often, such interpreters do interpreting on the side while studying for another profession.[56]

One of my informants stated that for many community interpreters of non-Finnish descent, interpreting is an "ethno-specific entry-level position" in working life and part of the process of becoming an active member of Finnish society. In fact, for many such interpreters, community

interpreting is just an intermediate phase before finding a "real job" or a "better job" in their "own field." It is quite typical for interpreters with a migrant background to have non-linear occupational itineraries: they may have interpreted for their family members as children (in informal settings) and started their working life in Finland as community interpreters, then studied and/or worked in another field or started their own business, for example a community-interpreting agency.[57] Eventually, a person may return to work as a public-service interpreter. To illustrate this point, an informant told an anecdote about an older member of the same ethnic group who expressed surprise over the fact that the informant was still an interpreter, saying, "*I could work as an interpreter by now.*"

Existing research has shown that while community interpreters engage in activities that appear to be identical (i.e., they all interpret similar situations), they do not act identically in each case. Thus, Tuija Kinnunen's study revealed differences in the ways in which court interpreters prepare for the assignment and behave during it, and Claudia V. Angelelli's research on medical interpreters showed that an interpreter's behavior and role are not the same in different work settings.[58] In the present data, such differences intersect with ethnic difference. While informants of foreign descent referred to an ethnic divide related to interpreter training, linguistic itineraries, and work trajectories, they were not able to identify differences between non-Finnish and Finnish interpreters per se. Informants of Finnish descent, on the other hand, mentioned differences related to education and training and sometimes work trajectories between Finnish and non-Finnish interpreters and emphasized the fact that there is a large proportion of interpreters who are not language professionals among non-Finnish interpreters and second-generation migrant interpreters. However, they showed little awareness of the reasons behind these differences and the position of interpreting in ethno-specific work trajectories. Besides, although becoming a *community* interpreter had not been a conscious choice for any of the Finnish interpreters in the research population – some of them had become community interpreters by chance in a way that is typical for the ethno-specific work trajectories common among interpreters of non-Finnish descent – most of them emphasized that they were professionals and had studied translation and/or interpreting at university.

These statements were accompanied by anecdotes and narratives about the lack of professionalism among non-Finnish interpreters. One informant complained that the growing number of young amateur interpreters from bilingual communities have a very weak professional identity. Another informant expressed surprise over the fact that many non-Finnish interpreters do not value interpreter training. One Finnish interpreter also complained that some foreign interpreters are not professional because they bribe service providers, do not prepare their assignments, and have too many working languages. This informant particularly criticized interpreters of English, stating that foreign interpreters with another main language (but also Finnish people who are not interpreters) are tempted to add English to their repertoire of working languages in order to increase their income even though their English proficiency may be insufficient and they will end up interpreting between two B working languages.[59]

While the comments of the interpreters of Finnish descent reflected unawareness of the characteristics of interpreting practice in migrant communities, interpreters of foreign descent appeared to have very little contact with professional associations such as the Finnish Association

of Translators and Interpreters. Indeed, linguistic itineraries and their corollary, ethnicity, also correlate with professionalization in this respect. According to data provided by the association in February 2016, the interpreter section of the association had 353 members. While 160 members were conference interpreters, 156 reported being legal interpreters but not community interpreters, 219 both legal and community interpreters, and 197 community interpreters but not legal interpreters. These 197 interpreters reported interpreting in a total of 705 language directions. In language pairs in which Finnish is the A language, there were 66 interpreters of English, 44 of Russian, 34 of German, 28 of French, 23 of Swedish, 18 of Spanish, 12 of Estonian, and 10 of Norwegian. No other language pairs with Finnish as an A language had more than 10 interpreters. Thus, some widely spoken languages and some important languages in community interpreting are well represented in the association. These languages include English, French, Russian, and Estonian. Notwithstanding, other important languages in community interpreting are clearly underrepresented in the association: Portuguese 8, Arabic 4, Romanian 4, Turkish 4, Chinese 3, Thai 2, Vietnamese 1, Farsi and/or Dari 1, Kurdish and/or Sorani 1. Some of the most important languages in community interpreting are absent. Thus, there were 0 interpreters of Somali or Albanian in the association. As interpreters of the most important migrant languages tend to be of foreign descent, these numbers indicate clearly that the interpreter section has failed to attract community interpreters of foreign descent and non-European descent in particular. In addition, they show that the symbolic capital related to professionalization[60] and credentials acting as a tool for distinction[61] (creating divides based on education) tend to accrue to interpreters of European languages.

Some non-Finnish informants thought that the translators' and interpreters' association was a trade union and had not joined it because they did not need a union or because they had joined another union. Some knew about the association but could not explain why they had not joined, although they occasionally participated in training sessions and other activities organized by the interpreter section of the association. Overall, non-Finnish informants did not know much about the association and its activities. In contrast, the interpreters of Finnish descent interviewed for this research were all members of the association. However, most of them complained that the interpreter section is run by elitist conference interpreters[62] who do not take into account the concerns and specific needs of community interpreters, although they appreciated the continuous training and networking opportunities offered by the section.

Similar complaints about the translators' and interpreters' association have been expressed in the community interpreters' online discussion forum. These concerns intersect with other worries: deteriorating financial situation, debate about the value of interpreter training and academic education, need for psychological supervision and counseling, and the image of community interpreting in the media especially since unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers arrived in fall 2015. In spring 2016, there was a discussion going on about the founding of a cooperative and a new association for community interpreters, on the one hand, or the foundation of a new section for community interpreters within the translators' and interpreters' association, on the other.

The new association was actually founded on March 7, 2016. The goals of these new and potential groups have been somewhat contradictory, which reflects incipient critical reflection, identified by

Şebnem Bahadir as a *sine qua non* of professionalization.[63] At the same time, the contradictions reflect the lack of a shared concept among community interpreters of the composition of their group, which Inghelleri has identified as characteristic of community interpreters.[64] Thus, the envisioned new section within the existing professional association aimed to attract a more diverse group of members than the existing interpreter section whereas the planned new association purported to attract academically trained professional interpreters (or interpreters with long work experience and good practices confirmed by peers if no academic degree is possible) in order to advance first and foremost the financial situation of community interpreters. However, the new association was not registered due to factors such as lack of wider interest among community interpreters, so that at the time of this publication, the only form of common institutional arena of Finnish community interpreters remains their Facebook group.

8. Conclusions: Accepting Diversity

A community can be conceptualized as a group of people that shares common goals and engages in activities aimed at achieving those goals; such a characterization would correspond for example to Eckert and McDonnell-Gilet's definition of a community of practice.[65] One could argue that, since all community interpreters practice community interpreting and are supposed to follow the same ethical code, community interpreters do in fact form a community. However, as this analysis and previous studies have shown, community interpreters do not necessarily share the same professional values or feel allegiance to their professional community. As a result, they do not form a community in this sense, or even a community of practice or an imagined community.[66] Rather, while community interpreters engage in the same nexus of practice, they do it for a variety of reasons, and within that nexus there are unsolved issues.

Indeed, all informants characterized community interpreters in Finland as a fragmented, heterogeneous, diverse, or non-existing community. One informant described this state as "the interpreters' disease," others referred to other communities related to community interpreting. Thus, many informants mentioned communities formed by interpreters with the same working languages as their primary professional communities. The online discussion group represents a new form of community. One informant pointed out that community interpreting is a movable practice, so that interpreters need not form a tight, well-structured community. This informant also stated that interpreters are part of each community in which they interpret. Similarly, some informants argued that the primary community for community interpreters is formed by the interpreting agency for which they work. Hence, the goal of forming a more cohesive and inclusive general community of community interpreters is not shared by the entire interpreter body.

While trained interpreters stressed the importance of education and training in order to form a real community, training does not guarantee professionalization in the form of active participation in interpreters' associative life and active fostering of shared goals. Indeed, beyond the issue of training, other factors are more difficult to unveil and modify. In the present analysis, the ethnic divide between interpreters of Finnish descent and non-Finnish descent emerges as the most important of those factors.

The audience of the panel discussion on communities of community interpreters organized in April 2015 consisted mostly of interpreters of Finnish descent, interpreter trainers, and students,

illustrating the fact that professionalization and community formation interest mostly interpreters of Finnish descent. Nonetheless, an effort had been made to attract interpreters of all backgrounds to the audience by informing interpreter agencies and posting a note about the event in the community interpreters' electronic discussion forum. The heated debate about ethnicity during the panel, on the other hand, illustrated the fact that while people tend to be afraid of raising the issue of race, ethnicity, and racism, they also tend to suppress the issue violently and emphasize other discourses when the issue is finally raised. Lack of information about other groups and shortage of rational tools to discuss the issue are potential explanations. During the debate and in follow-up interviews, education and the professionalization related to it emerged as discourses employed to obscure ethnicity. While educational discourse surfaced explicitly from all forms of data that I have analyzed, ethnicity only emerged explicitly in the emotionally loaded context of the debate and implicitly as a discourse intertwining with all other discourses and topics in the interviews. Therefore, while educational discourse is powerfully foregrounded, the discourse on ethnicity is both foregrounded and hidden. For the most part, both discourses create divisions among the interpreters. Over the years, there have been several attempts to resolve the problem of interpreter training in Finland and many of them have been quite successful, although more volume is needed. These actions have been initiated mostly by public-service and language-access providers. In contrast, since the ethnic divide is largely hidden and unspoken, it has not been acknowledged as an issue and there have been no attempts to resolve it. However, if the goal is to form a real community, this issue needs to be resolved. Solutions must arise from interpreters themselves – critical reflection is probably a good starting point.

The additional data used in this analysis (i.e. online discussions and events aimed at founding a separate association) show that the social issue (i.e. lack of a cohesive community among community interpreters) was identified accurately in this research and that the nexus of practice may be changing at the time of this writing. Indeed, now that Finnish community interpreters are forced to cooperate because of financial pressures leading to decreased income, there are greater opportunities to resolve some of the issues. In all social issues, everyone is responsible to a certain extent. However, in order to raise awareness about responsibility, social actors need to acknowledge that in addition to the individual dimension, responsibility entails a social dimension. As pointed out by an audience member during the panel discussion, it is necessary to accept the fact that interpreters form a heterogeneous and diverse body, otherwise new formations run the risk of reiterating the exclusionist discourses and gatekeeping practices of the past.

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Notes

[1] I am using the terms *community interpreter* and *public-service interpreter* interchangeably.

[2] For more details regarding community interpreting in Finland, see Simo K. Määttä, "Interpreting the Discourse of Reporting: The Case of Police and Asylum Interviews in Finland," *Translation & Interpreting* 7, no. 3 (2015), pp. 24-25.

[3] Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, *Nexus Analysis: Discourse and the Emerging Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2004). For a comprehensive summary, see Pia Lane, "Nexus Analysis," in *Handbook of Pragmatics Online*, ed. Jan-Ola Östman and Jef Verschueren (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2014), < https://benjamins.com/online/hop/>, website consulted 2 March 2016.

[4] Pia Lane,"Nexus Analysis."

[5] Kaisa Koskinen, *Translating Institutions. An Ethnographic Study of EU Translation* (Manchester: St Jerome, 2008).

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[7] Ron Scollon, "Action and Text," in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, eds. Ruth Wodak and Martin Meyer (London: Sage, 2001), pp. 139-183.

[8] Penelope Eckert and Sally McDonnell-Gilet, "Think Practically and Look Locally: Language and Gender as a Community-Based Practice," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21 (1992), pp. 461-462.

[9] Ron Scollon, "Action and Text," pp. 50-51.

[10] Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, *Nexus Analysis*, p. 159.

[11] Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, *Nexus Analysis*, p. 13.

[12] Ervin Goffman, *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* (New York: Free Press, 1963).

[13] Simo Määttä and Sari Pietikäinen, "Ideology," in *Handbook of Pragmatics Online*, eds. Jan-Ola Östman and Jef Verschueren (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2014), < https://benjamins.com/online/hop/>, website consulted 2 March 2016.

[14] Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, *Nexus Analysis*, p. 160

[15] Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, *Nexus Analysis*, p. 156.

[16] Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, *Nexus Analysis*, pp. 8-10.

[17] Ron Scollon and Suzie Wong Scollon, *Nexus Analysis*, p. 13.

[18] Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), p. 88 (my translation).

[19] Rakefet Sela-Sheffy, "Translator's Identity Work: Introducing Micro-Sociological Theory of Identity to the Discussion of Translator's Habitus," in *Remapping Habitus in Translation Studies*, ed. Gisella M. Vorderobermeier (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), pp. 43-55. See also Moira Inghilleri, ed., *Bourdieu and the sociology of translation and interpreting, The Translator*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2005); Claudia V. Angelelli (ed.), *The Sociological Turn in Translation and Interpreting Studies* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012).

[20] Jean-Marc Gouanvic, "A Bourdieusian Theory of Translation, or the Coincidence of Practical Instances: Field, "Habitus," Capital, and "Illusio," *The Translator* 11, no. 2 (2005), pp. 147-166; Michaela Wolf, "Bourdieu's "Rules of the Game": An Introspection into Methodological Questions of Translation Sociology," *Matraga* 14, no. 20 (2007), pp. 130-145.

[21] Moira Inghilleri, "Habitus, Field and Discourse—Interpreting as a Socially Situated Activity," *Target* 15, no. 2 (2003), pp. 243-268.

[22] Peter J. Burke and Jan E. Stets, *Identity Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[23] Rakefet Sela-Sheffy, "Translator's Identity Work," pp. 43-44.

[24] Cf. the criticism of the concept of profession: Pierre Bourdieu and Louis Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), p. 242.

[25] See e.g. Simo K. Määttä, "Interpreting the Discourse of Reporting," pp. 21-35.

[26] Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT), *Väestörakenne: Äidinkielenään kotimaisia kieliä puhuvien määrä väheni toisena vuotena peräkkäin*, < http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/2015/vaerak_2015_2016-04-01_tie_001_fi.html >, website consulted 5 January 2017.

[27] Suomen virallinen tilasto (SVT), *Väestörakenne: Joka kymmenes 25–44-vuotias on ulkomaalaistaustainen*, < http://tilastokeskus.fi/til/vaerak/2015/01/vaerak_2015_01_2016-09-23_tie_001_fi.html >, website consulted 5 January 2017.

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[61] Esther Monzó, "Legal and Translational Occupations in Spain: Regulation and Specialization in Jurisdictional Struggles," in *Identity and Status in the Translational Professions*, p. 14.

[62] Cf. Franz Pöchhacker, "Is There Anybody Out There? Community Interpreting in Austria," p. 215. Conference interpreters may also be compared to the elite formed by certain literary translators and their cultural gate-keeping role: Rakefet Sela-Sheffy, "Translator's Identity Work," p. 50.

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[64] Cf. Moira Inghilleri, "Mediating Zones of Incertainty: Interpreter Agency, the Interpreting Habitus, and Political Asylum Adjudication," in *Bourdieu and the sociology of translation and interpreting*, ed. Moira Inghilleri, pp. 69-85.

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