

# Navigating the Gray Zone: When Interpreters Become Mediators and Communication Facilitators

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**Abstract**—Beyond the realm of mere word-for-word translation, interpreters often find themselves traversing the delicate terrain of communication facilitation and mediation. This article delves into the intricate dance between interpreting and these additional roles, exploring the factors that propel interpreters into the mediator's shoes and the subsequent challenges they face. The article dissects the circumstances that necessitate an interpreter's shift from neutral conduit to active mediator. Cultural clashes, implicit biases, and emotional undercurrents can all trigger this transition, demanding the interpreter to navigate sensitive dynamics and bridge communication gaps that extend beyond language. The article then grapples with the question of control: What elements of this mediation role can be consciously managed and overcome by the interpreter, and which ones remain stubbornly embedded in the communication landscape, posing significant hurdles? This nuanced analysis sheds light on the interpreter's agency and limitations within the complex realm of cross-cultural communication. By examining the gray zone between interpreting and mediation, this article offers valuable insights for both interpreters and those who rely on their expertise. It paves the way for a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of interpreter roles and the challenges that come with navigating the delicate dance between languages and cultures.

**Index Terms**—interpreter, mediation, communication facilitator, cultural clashes, cross-cultural communication

## I. INTRODUCTION

While interpreters and mediators play seemingly distinct roles in facilitating communication across languages and cultures, the lines between them can sometimes blur. Interpreters may find themselves adopting mediatory behaviors for various reasons, leading to questions about the overlap and potential boundaries between these professions. This paper explores the nuances of interpreter overreach into mediation, examining both avoidable and inevitable factors contributing to this phenomenon.

It is crucial to recognize that mediation in interpreting contexts should not be conflated with the core function of interpreting itself. Mediation represents an additional and arguably distinct service that addresses communication gaps beyond the scope of an interpreter's ethical and professional code (Jongsma, 2009; Pöschhacker, 2011). This distinction arises from the fundamental difference in their goals: whereas interpreters strive for linguistic accuracy and neutrality, mediators focus on empowering clients, facilitating informed decision-making, and navigating cultural complexities (Martín & Phelan, 2009; Angelelli, 2006). So, it is worth mentioning that while both may involve bridging cultural barriers, the approaches differ. Interpreters typically expect participants to ask clarifying questions, fostering a dialogical process, while mediators might proactively provide explanations to address potential misunderstandings (Lee, 2013). According to Hale (2007), interpreters hold a crucial role in bridging communication gaps amidst cultural clashes or linguistic discrepancies. When faced with situations where participants struggle to understand each other due to conflicting cultural beliefs, practices, or a lack of linguistic equivalents, interpreters can, with the explicit consent of all parties involved, facilitate effective communication by offering cultural insights or assisting in the development of explanations comprehensible to everyone. This intervention can prove invaluable in overcoming roadblocks in communication and fostering mutual understanding (Hale, 2007).

Comprehending the factors propelling interpreter overreach into mediation is essential for promoting effective communication and upholding professional boundaries. Subsequent sections will delve deeper into these factors, differentiating avoidable cases arising from training gaps or personal inclinations from those rooted in inherent limitations of language translation in complex intercultural contexts.

## II. MAPPING THE INTERPRETER: DEFINITIONS & ROLES

Interpreters and mediators, though often intertwined in practice, fulfill distinct and complementary roles across various settings. While bilingualism might be a prerequisite, it alone does not qualify someone as either (Witter-Merithew et al., 2004). Generalist interpreters, defined as possessing "more than superficial knowledge and competence to accurately and reliably interpret a wide range of low-risk communication interactions" (Witter-Merithew et al., 2004),

primarily focus on bridging language barriers. Their core responsibility lies in accurate and nuanced conveyance of the source language message, ensuring completeness and faithfulness (Wadensjö, 2008). This doesn't translate to word-for-word replication but rather a meticulous transfer of meaning and intent (Baker, 2005). By doing so, interpreters enable effective communication between individuals who wouldn't otherwise understand each other.

Pöchhacker maintains that competence in both languages and cultures involved is paramount for interpreters (Pöchhacker, 2016). They must possess strong listening and comprehension skills and the ability to accurately interpret what they hear and translate it into the target language while adhering to the nuances of both cultures (Nunan, 2004). In this regard, Martín & Phelan state that preparation for a specific assignment is crucial, encompassing relevant terminology and, ideally, background information about the context (Martín & Phelan, 2009).

Furthermore, interpreters need a clear understanding of their professional boundaries and adherence to ethical codes (Jongsma, 2009). While core principles like accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, and confidentiality are common across codes of ethics, cultural and regional variations exist, necessitating careful consideration (Waddock, 2010).

While the code of ethics serves as a valuable guide, outlining expected conduct and providing frameworks for navigating unexpected ethical dilemmas, it's crucial to remember that it's not a foolproof solution to every predicament (Pym, 2010). As Lee aptly emphasizes, interpreters must possess critical thinking skills to identify and address ethical dilemmas responsibly, even when equipped with a code (Lee, 2013). This point becomes particularly salient when considering the concerns that arise when interpreters assume mediatory roles without proper training or awareness. According to Hale, untrained interpreters are less likely to appreciate the nuances of the code and its implications in such situations, potentially leading to violations of professional boundaries and jeopardizing the accuracy and impartiality of communication (Hale, 2007).

Mikkelsen (2008) aptly highlights the interpreter's "difficult role" of faithfully portraying the speaker's intention, emphasizing accuracy beyond mere word-for-word translation (2008, p. 115). This focus on meaning aligns with ethical codes that guide interpreters to maintain impartiality and neutrality. However, Wadensjö argues that interpreters are not simply translating; they are actively performing actions on behalf of others, including persuading, agreeing, explaining, and even lying (1998). This raises the question: if interpreters act on behalf of others, does that make them mediators rather than interpreters?

In the context of medical settings, this line can become particularly nuanced. While interpreters should primarily focus on accurate language facilitation, situations may arise where a client's well-being is at risk. In such instances, stepping into a mediatory role to protect the client might be ethically justifiable. Hail suggests that interpreters may act as advocates to address mistreatment or abuse, for example, by alerting supervisors to patterns of disrespect towards patients (as cited in Hale, p. 6). However, this intervention should be approached with caution. Organizations like the International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA) and the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC) emphasize that advocacy and intercultural mediation should only be undertaken when necessary for effective communication and with careful professional judgment (IMIA, 2006; NCIHC Health Care Standards of Performance). Interpreters are not cultural experts, and offering unsolicited advice can be detrimental, potentially providing inaccurate information and jeopardizing the client's case (ITIA).

The key lies in maintaining a clear distinction between interpretation and mediation. Interpreters should primarily focus on bridging the language gap and refraining from providing personal opinions or advice. This ensures impartiality and protects both the client and the service provider. As the IMIA and NCIHC guidelines state, interpreters "will not interject personal opinions or counsel patients" and should "limit their professional activity to interpreting" (IMIA, 2006; NCIHC Health Care Standards of Performance).

### III. THE MEDIATOR ROLE IN INTERPRETING: BEYOND LANGUAGE FACILITATION

While professional interpreters play a crucial role in bridging language gaps, "ad-hoc" interpreters within familial or social networks often emerge in scenarios where individuals lack proficiency in the dominant language. These untrained individuals, operating outside professional frameworks, are frequently referred to as mediators (Giménez Romero, 1997). However, their function extends beyond mere language translation, venturing into the realm of cultural brokerage and conflict prevention.

In medical settings, for example, mediators act as cultural bridges, facilitating communication between patients and service providers. They help service providers understand cultural nuances that might impact the interpreting process and, ultimately, the overall healthcare experience (Giménez Romero, 1997). Additionally, they can empower patients by informing them about their entitlements, navigating the healthcare system, and encouraging them to voice concerns (Martín & Phelan, 2009).

Beyond facilitating communication, mediators can foster respect and trust between parties by meeting individually beforehand, especially when dealing with diverse linguistic backgrounds. However, it's crucial to remember that their role primarily focuses on cultural brokering, not language translation, as effective mediators require specific knowledge and skills. They must be familiar with mediation methodologies and possess a keen understanding of how culture and contextual factors influence interactions (Martín & Phelan, 2009). Additionally, they should be adept at handling pressure, particularly in situations involving heated arguments or sensitive topics.

Unlike interpreters, who are expected to remain neutral, mediators can offer opinions and evaluate situations. This inherent subjectivity, however, highlights a potential drawback. Moreover, unlike professional interpreters, whose knowledge and judgment are honed through extensive training and experience, mediators' assessments may not always be grounded in solid expertise. Service providers should, therefore, consider this potential knowledge gap when weighing advice or opinions offered by mediators on culture-related issues.

Furthermore, the impartiality of mediators, often friends, family members, or relatives, is another key distinction from trained interpreters. Their personal connection can lead to bias, potentially alienating service providers and compromising the patient's empowerment (Martín & Phelan, 2009). Therefore, it is always recommended that even trained mediators should be mindful of this bias and avoid assisting close relatives or friends to maintain impartiality.

Finally, the emphasis on cultural understanding in mediation can sometimes come at the expense of translation accuracy. Mediators, not necessarily possessing the same level of language proficiency and terminology knowledge as professional interpreters, might prioritize facilitating communication over verbatim translation. This can lead to inaccuracies and misunderstandings, further emphasizing the distinct roles and skillsets of interpreters and mediators.

#### IV. FORMS OF MEDIATION IN INTERPRETING CONTEXT

Mediation is a complex process that can take many forms in interpreting sessions. Interpreters may need to mediate between different parties, cultures, or even languages. While both interpreters and mediators aim to empower, their approaches differ. Interpreters strive for neutrality, intervening only to prevent conflict arising from cultural misunderstandings. Mediators, conversely, may advocate for the service recipient, ensuring their needs and concerns are heard (Martín & Phelan, 2009). Some common forms of mediation include:

- a) **Intervening in the topic of interpreting:** This may involve clarifying or rephrasing what has been said or providing additional information that is relevant to the interpretation. For example, an interpreter might need to explain a cultural reference that is not familiar to one of the parties involved (Lee & Slotte, 2012).
- b) **Further explanation of issues they come across in the course of interpreting:** This could include explaining the meaning of a particular term or phrase or providing background information on a topic that is being discussed. For example, an interpreter might need to explain the legal system in their country to a foreign visitor (Gonzalez, 2013).
- c) **Advocacy of a certain idea, advocacy of client:** Interpreters may sometimes need to advocate for a particular idea or position or for the interests of their client. This should always be done in a neutral and objective manner, and the interpreter should avoid expressing their own personal opinions or beliefs (American Psychological Association, 2017).
- d) **Expressing one's own opinion in relation to the interpreting topic:** In some cases, it may be appropriate for an interpreter to express their own opinion on a topic that is being discussed. However, this should only be done if it is clear that the interpreter is not taking sides or trying to influence the outcome of the conversation (Bowen, 2016).
- e) **Offering help in issues not related to the interpreting assignment:** Interpreters may sometimes be asked to provide help or advice on issues that are not related to their interpreting assignment. For example, an interpreter might be asked to help a client find a doctor or lawyer (Chiu, 2010).
- f) **Sympathising or desympathising with the client:** Interpreters should avoid expressing sympathy or antipathy for any of the parties involved in an interpreting session. This could bias their interpretation and make it difficult for them to remain neutral (Jarvis, 2014).

It is worth mentioning that mediation is not always necessary or appropriate in interpreting sessions. In some cases, it may be best for the interpreter to simply provide a neutral and objective interpretation of what is being said. However, in other cases, mediation may be essential for ensuring that the communication is clear and effective.

#### V. THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLES OF INTERPRETING AND MEDIATION IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Effective communication across cultural and linguistic barriers is crucial in various settings and situations. While interpreting and mediation often appear intertwined, they represent distinct yet complementary roles that enhance communication and facilitate conflict resolution. The following sections explore the importance of both interpreting and mediation, clarify their roles, and highlight the potential pitfalls of conflating them.

##### A. *Interpreting as a Tool to Bridge the Language Gap*

While mediators navigate the complexities of cross-cultural communication through interpretation and opinion, interpreters, on the other hand, focus on the technical precision of language translation. Their primary role is to ensure clear and nuanced communication of verbal and nonverbal messages between individuals who speak different languages (Baker, 2005; Pöchhacker, 2016). This meticulous approach involves paying close attention to cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and nonverbal cues to faithfully convey the intended meaning (Nunan, 2004; Wadensjö, 2008). When it comes to healthcare, this attention to detail becomes particularly crucial, as interpreters play a vital role

in ensuring patients understand medical information, consent to procedures, and actively participate in their care (Lee & Joo, 2017; Purnell & Paulanka, 2005).

### *B. Mediation as a Bridge to Understanding*

While skilled interpreters bridge language barriers, mediators take communication a step further, acting as facilitators and helping individuals express concerns, navigate cultural differences, and reach mutually agreeable solutions (Jongsma, 2009; Mart  & Phelan, 2009). Baker (2011) maintains that interpreters' expertise extends beyond language translation, encompassing conflict resolution strategies, cultural awareness, and active listening. In healthcare settings, this expanded skillset proves invaluable. Mediators can assist patients and providers in understanding diagnoses, treatment options, and the cultural values surrounding illness and communication (Betancourt et al., 2003; Green & Bouleware, 2013). For instance, as Dohan et al. highlights, a mediator might help an elderly Russian patient's family understand the cultural implications of disclosing a cancer diagnosis and facilitate effective communication with the healthcare provider.

### *C. Collaboration and Confusion*

While both interpreting and mediation are essential for effective cross-cultural communication, confusion can arise regarding their distinct roles. The terms "interpreter", "cultural mediator", and "intercultural mediator" are often used interchangeably in countries like France and Italy, blurring the lines between language and cultural facilitation (Pchhacker, 2008). This confusion can lead to misunderstanding and underutilization of each role's unique skills. For instance, relying solely on an interpreter to address cultural differences might overlook the need for conflict resolution strategies provided by a mediator.

### *D. Harmonious Collaboration*

To optimize communication and conflict resolution, interpreting and mediation should be seen as complementary rather than alternative approaches. Mediators can effectively prepare both interpreters and clients for potential cultural misunderstandings, ensuring accurate and culturally appropriate communication (Hale, 2007). Additionally, interpreters can provide essential language support during mediation sessions, facilitating the exchange of information and emotions. This collaborative approach can significantly enhance understanding, build trust, and pave the way for successful conflict resolution.

## VI. FACTORS PUSHING INTERPRETERS INTO MEDIATOR ROLES

Interpreters navigate language gaps, but additional elements can push them into a mediatory stance. These include both linguistic and non-linguistic challenges, coupled with varying interpretations of interpreter and mediator roles and the interpreter's commitment to their ethical guidelines. Such factors may include:

### *A. Linguistic Factors*

While interpreters strive for neutrality, certain linguistic factors can subtly nudge them towards a mediating role in an interpreting session (Waddock, 2010). One such factor is ambiguity in language. Words and phrases often hold multiple meanings (Baker, 2011), requiring the interpreter to choose the most fitting based on context. This choice, however, can inadvertently influence the speaker's message, potentially leaning toward an interpretation favored by the interpreter (Pchhacker, 2016). For example, translating "He made a strong statement" could carry various nuances, ranging from highlighting conviction to implying aggression, depending on the interpreter's chosen vocabulary and emphasis (Wolf, 2004).

Cultural and idiomatic expressions present another challenge. Literal translations often fail to capture their true essence (Lee, 2011), forcing the interpreter to adapt or explain, potentially reshaping the message for better cultural resonance (Pym, 2010). The wording of these adaptations can subtly influence the tone and intent of the original message, pushing the interpreter towards a mediating role (Baker, 2011). For example, translating "He's pulling my leg" as a metaphor for joking might differ depending on the target culture's understanding of "leg pulling," potentially altering the perceived humor or seriousness of the statement (Nunan, 2004).

Power dynamics reflected in language use can also nudge interpreters towards mediation. An interpreter might unconsciously find themselves "softening" the language of a lower-ranking speaker to avoid conflict or misunderstanding with a higher-ranking one (Waddock, 2010). This "smoothing" process, while aiming for politeness, can subtly alter the power dynamics at play, blurring the interpreter's neutral position (Baker, 2011). For instance, a speaker's clenched fists and raised voice while saying "I disagree" might be translated with a neutral tone and open body language by the interpreter, aiming to de-escalate the situation and bridge the emotional gap (Tannen, 1994).

Finally, emotional language can trigger the interpreter's empathy, leading them to soften phrases or add qualifiers to the translated message (Pchhacker, 2016). While this protects the recipient from harsh emotions, it can also dilute the impact of the original message's tone and intent (Baker, 2011). Wolf (2004) gives an example and argues that translating "I'm absolutely furious!" to "He seems quite upset" might downplay the speaker's anger, inadvertently shaping the audience's emotional response and minimizing the potential for conflict resolution.

## B. *Extra-Linguistic Factors*

The role of an interpreter is often viewed as a technical feat – the seamless transfer of words from one language to another. However, the reality is far more nuanced. Often, interpreters find themselves entangled in a web of **extra-linguistic factors** – cultural expectations, emotional undercurrents, power imbalances – that push them beyond mere translation. The following sections examine these invisible forces, uncovering how they can propel an interpreter from a neutral channel to an active mediator, navigating delicate situations and influencing outcomes.

### (a). *Interpreter-Related Factors*

While interpreters play a crucial role in facilitating communication across linguistic and cultural barriers, there can be instances where they overstep their boundaries and venture into mediation territory. This phenomenon can be attributed to a range of interpreter-related factors, including:

#### 1. *Personal Competence*

An interpreter's personal competence, a blend of emotional intelligence and cultural awareness, can unexpectedly propel them into a mediator role. High emotional intelligence, as Angelelli (2006) notes, can evoke a strong desire to address emotional undercurrents and conflicts beyond mere translation, blurring the lines between facilitation and dispute resolution. Similarly, deep cultural understanding, while invaluable, can lead to misinterpreted boundaries, as Mart ın and Phelan (2009) suggest, causing interpreters to unintentionally wade into cultural mediation during client interactions. Thus, these valuable personal strengths, while crucial for effective interpretation, also hold the potential to subtly shift the interpreter's role, demanding careful navigation of the complex landscapes of communication.

#### 2. *Professional Attitudes*

While professional qualities like empathy and client engagement are crucial for effective interpretation, they can also subtly push interpreters towards unexpected mediation roles. This potential shift can be influenced by several factors, including over-identification of an interpreter, lack of professional boundaries, and professional self-efficacy. For one thing, interpreters who form strong bonds with clients ("over-identification", as Jongsma (2009) terms it) may feel compelled to extend beyond mere linguistic accuracy, offering unsolicited advice or even acting as peacemakers. For another thing, those with ambiguous professional boundaries (Pöchhacker, 2011) can morph into cultural advisors or confidantes, blurring interpreters with advocates. Moreover, interpreters lacking confidence in their translation skills ("professional self-efficacy" in Author, 2012) might resort to mediation as a way to patch communicative holes, using non-linguistic interventions to smooth interactions. In such cases, noble professional attitudes, like empathy and a desire to help, can unintentionally push interpreters into roles beyond their intended scope.

#### 3. *Interpreter's Personal Experience*

Such extra-linguistic factors include both life experiences and personal biases. The personal tapestry of an interpreter can unexpectedly unravel into unexpected mediation. Interpreters with a history of navigating cultural misunderstandings or conflicts might feel uniquely equipped to intervene, potentially blurring the lines between their lived experiences and professional responsibilities (Wadensjö 2008). However, these experiences can also harbor unseen biases, as Lee (2013) warns. Unconscious leanings towards either party can lead interpreters to overstep their role, potentially favoring one client over the other or subtly influencing the communication flow in an unwarranted manner. Thus, while personal experiences can enrich interpretation, they can also present a delicate tightrope walk between empathy and unintended influence.

#### 4. *Inadequate Language or Interpreting Skills*

This includes hiring unqualified interpreters, interpreters with limited vocabulary, and translation errors. The delicate line between interpretation and mediation can be easily blurred by the limitations of some interpreters. Unqualified individuals, often hired solely on bilingualism (Jongsma, 2009), can struggle with inaccuracies and misunderstandings, prompting them to clarify meaning and unintentionally step into a mediator role. This is further exacerbated by the lack of regulations in many countries (Jongsma, 2009), allowing anyone with basic language skills to enter the field. Then, the limited vocabulary adds another layer of complexity, as interpreters might resort to paraphrasing or explanations that unintentionally alter the message or inject personal interpretations (Nunan, 2004). Furthermore, unintentional translation errors can even trigger conflict and necessitate mediation as interpreters attempt to repair miscommunication and clarify messages (Baker, 2005). Thus, without proper qualifications, fluency, and accuracy, interpreters can unknowingly drift into a mediator role, highlighting the importance of stringent regulations and professional development within the interpreting field.

#### 5. *Lack of Competence, Training, or Guidance*

This includes lack of competency of the interpreter, inadequate training of interpreters, and lack of institutional support. While professional attitudes and interpersonal skills can push interpreters towards mediation, even competent interpreters can be pulled into the role due to external factors. Inadequate training in professional boundaries, ethical considerations, and clear distinctions between interpreter and mediator roles can leave interpreters susceptible to

overstepping their mandate (Waddock, 2010). Similarly, a lack of institutional support, with organizations failing to provide clear guidelines and resources, can contribute to confusion and role ambiguity, leading to unintentional mediation (Jongsma, 2009). This is why professional organizations like IMIA and CIOL emphasize continuous assessment and adherence to ethical codes, and frameworks like the "Entry-to-Practice Competencies for ASL-English Interpreters" (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005) prioritize areas like professionalism and ethical knowledge. Ultimately, ensuring clarity in roles, providing adequate training, and offering institutional support is crucial in preventing unintended mediation and safeguarding the ethical practice of interpretation.

*(b). Client-Related Factors*

Such factors mainly evolve around the educational background of the client. Martín and Phelan (2009) argue that a client's education level can significantly impact the interpreting process. Interpreters must adjust their strategies based on the client's vocabulary and comprehension level. Clients with higher education may require less explanation, while those with lower levels may benefit from a more mediatory approach to bridge conceptual gaps.

*(c). Service Provider-Related Factors*

Such factors mainly evolve around the speaker's consistency. The consistency of the service provider's speech also plays a crucial role. Clear and organized speakers allow for accurate interpretation, while inconsistent speakers with erratic ideas or vague language can necessitate a more detective-like approach from the interpreter (Pöchhacker, 2011). In such cases, deciphering intent, inferring meaning, and bridging logical gaps can blur the lines between interpretation and mediation, potentially straining the interpreter's ethical boundaries.

*(d). Awareness Level of the Interpreter's Role by Either Party Involved in the Process of Interpreting*

The awareness level of the interpreter's role by either party involved in the process of interpreting is another factor that can be taken into consideration. Beyond language barriers, interpreters navigate a complex landscape of expectations and misconceptions surrounding their role. These can inadvertently push them into a mediator role, potentially compromising ethical boundaries and hindering effective communication.

*(e). Client and Service Provider Misconceptions About the Interpreter's Role*

Clients and service providers often hold inaccurate beliefs about interpreter roles. Mistaking them for advocates or advisors can be detrimental. Clients might expect embellishments, biased translations, or even personal opinions from the interpreter, blurring the lines between neutrality and advocacy (Angelelli, 2008). This pressure to take sides can compromise the interpreter's ethical obligation to remain impartial and deliver accurate information. As Angelelli (2008) aptly points out, "reconciling the ethical principle of impartiality" becomes challenging when interpreters are expected to act as advocates or social workers within healthcare settings (p. 150).

Similarly, service providers might unintentionally involve interpreters in mediation duties. Asking them to explain cultural nuances, handle emotional outbursts, or navigate tense situations can overburden them with tasks beyond their core function. While interpreters can certainly contribute to building rapport and understanding, they should not be burdened with resolving conflicts or acting as therapists (Pöchhacker, 2016).

So, preventing unintended mediation hinges on clear communication and education for both clients and service providers. The interpreter's core purpose must be established upfront to bridge the language gap with accuracy and impartiality. Pre-assignment briefings outlining interpreter roles and limitations can set expectations and avoid misunderstandings. Additionally, training clients and service providers on the interpreter's ethical code, especially neutrality and confidentiality, fosters trust and respect. During sessions, consistently reminding everyone of the interpreter's role and encouraging direct communication between clients and service providers keeps the focus on accurate language transfer and optimized interactions. By taking these proactive steps, we can empower interpreters to excel in their core role and prevent unintentional forays into mediation.

By emphasizing the interpreter's commitment to neutrality, professionalism, and their specific skillset, we can ensure they remain focused on their primary task: facilitating accurate and unbiased communication between parties who do not share a common language. This empowers everyone involved to engage in constructive communication and work towards mutually beneficial outcomes.

*(f). Level of Adherence to the Codes of Ethics*

While interpreter codes of ethics prioritize neutrality and impartiality (Jongsma, 2009), their application in real-world scenarios can inadvertently push interpreters towards mediation or communication facilitation due to several factors. The first relates to cultural explanation. Encouraged by some codes, this practice blurs the lines during sensitive topics as interpreters navigate complex cultural nuances beyond simply conveying words (Lee, 2013). Wadensjö (2008) maintains that this "fixing" of communication, emphasized in some codes, involves actions like paraphrasing, smoothing awkwardness, and filling cultural gaps. So, while facilitating understanding, these actions deviate from the ideal of pure information transfer.

Furthermore, confidentiality requirements can unwittingly place interpreters in mediator roles. Trusting their neutral position, parties may confide in them, potentially influencing outcomes and blurring the lines between facilitator and

mediator (Pöchhacker, 2011). This gap between the ethical ideal and real-world application necessitates recognizing this nuance. Both interpreters and users of interpreting services require effective navigation of these situations while minimizing potential bias and undue influence (Jongsma, 2009).

In essence, interpreter codes of ethics, despite striving for neutrality, can, through factors like cultural explanation, communication "fixing," and confidentiality, nudge interpreters towards mediating and facilitating roles. Recognizing this is crucial for ensuring effective communication and minimizing unintended consequences.

### *(g). Ideologies and Beliefs of Interpreters*

Intermediaries in cross-cultural communication, interpreters often navigate a complex landscape where language is just one layer of understanding. Beyond technical proficiency, their personal ideologies and beliefs can significantly influence how they approach their role, potentially pushing them towards a more mediatory function. Here's how interpreter ideologies and beliefs can shape their mediatory role:

#### *1. Ideological Alignment and Bias*

Interpreters' own ideologies and biases, while ideally minimized, can influence their interpretation and communication, potentially leading to unintentional mediation (Pöchhacker, 2018). For example, an interpreter with strong political views might unintentionally soften or amplify certain messages based on their alignment with the speaker's ideology. This can create tension and necessitate a conscious effort to maintain neutrality and avoid influencing the outcome of the interaction.

#### *2. Cultural Sensitivity and Empathy*

Interpreters with strong cultural awareness and empathy may naturally gravitate towards resolving misunderstandings and facilitating cultural bridges (Hammer, 2019). In addition to that, understanding the cultural context of messages and the underlying values of participants can help them identify potential conflicts and bridge communication gaps. For example, an interpreter familiar with the collectivist values of a particular culture might interpret a seemingly direct statement as a nuanced expression of concern, preventing misunderstandings (Ting-Toomey, 1985).

#### *3. Personal Values and Moral Compass*

Interpreters' personal values and ethical beliefs can influence their decisions when faced with ethical dilemmas or conflicting perspectives (Adler & Jönsson, 2012). For instance, an interpreter with strong human rights beliefs might feel compelled to advocate for a client facing discrimination, even if it goes beyond strict language translation. This can lead to them taking on a more mediatory role, facilitating fair communication and addressing underlying power imbalances.

So, it is important to note that the extent to which interpreter ideologies and beliefs influence their mediatory role varies depending on individual characteristics, context, and training. Moreover, maintaining neutrality and professionalism should remain paramount, with conscious effort required to avoid imposing personal beliefs on the interpretation process.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Venturing beyond the confines of mere translation, interpreters often find themselves traversing the complex and dynamic terrain of communication facilitation and mediation. This article has illuminated the intricate dance between these roles, highlighting the factors that nudge interpreters towards the mediator's shoes, from cultural clashes and implicit biases to emotional undercurrents. By demystifying the gray zone between these professions, we gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of interpreter roles and the critical contribution they make to bridging cross-cultural communication gaps.

However, the journey doesn't end with recognizing diverse roles. Embracing the distinctness and, crucially, the complementarity of interpreters and mediators paves the way for a future where communication across divides flourishes. In healthcare settings, for instance, recognizing the limitations of an untrained mediator in terms of language expertise and impartiality becomes paramount. This fosters collaboration, where interpreters' linguistic prowess harmonizes with culturally competent mediators' understanding of nuanced social dynamics, leading to improved healthcare outcomes and patient satisfaction.

Beyond healthcare, this synergy unlocks doors in conflict resolution, legal settings, and any domain where intercultural understanding paves the way for progress. When we acknowledge the inherent complexities of language, from ambiguity to emotional triggers, we empower interpreters to navigate effectively, striving for conscious neutrality even in the face of linguistic challenges. This ensures accurate, unbiased communication, a cornerstone of effective conflict resolution and meaningful interaction across cultures.

Ultimately, recognizing the interpreter's multifaceted role is not merely an academic exercise but a call to action. We can build a more inclusive and equitable world by fostering collaboration, acknowledging the diverse expertise of both professions and equipping interpreters with the necessary training and support. It is a world where diverse voices are not just heard but truly understood and where the intricate ballet of cross-cultural communication is facilitated not by translators alone but by a symphony of trained professionals working in tandem. In this harmonious collaboration lies

the key to unlocking a future of mutual understanding and respect, where bridges of communication connect us across linguistic and cultural divides.

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His academic journey began as a translation tutor at the University of Western Sydney before transitioning to faculty positions at Effat University and United Arab Emirates University, eventually landing at Al-Ahliyyah Amman University - Jordan. He is a seasoned professional, accredited by NAATI, the Australian National Accreditation Authority for Translator and Interpreters (2004), with extensive experience in interpreting, translating, and sight-translation across diverse settings, including courts, hospitals, and detention centers. His research interests lie at the intersection of theory and practice, encompassing areas like Machine & computer-assisted translation, corpus-based translation, translation/interpreting theory and practice, translation/interpreting pedagogy, translation/interpreting quality assessment and evaluation, manipulation in translation/interpreting, and translation & interpreting research methods.

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