



Language Diversity and Access

Interpretation and translation as indispensable tools to ensure accessibility of civil rights and duties for all

Pascal Rillof
Antwerp Interpretation and Translation Service
Belgium

I, Hassan, son of Mohammed the weigher, I, John Leo de' Medici, circumcized by a barber's hand and baptized by the hand of the Pope, am called this day the African, but I am not from Africa nor from Europe, nor from Arabia. [...] I am from no country, from no city, no tribe. I am a son to the roads, my country is the caravan, and my life is the most unexpected of journeys. [...] From my mouth you will hear Arabic, Turkish, Castilian, Berber, Hebrew, Latin and Italian, for all languages, all kinds of prayer belong to me. I am only of God and the earth, and soon I will return to them.¹

In many Moroccan and Turkish families we see the generation conflict turned upside down: the children are no longer dependent on their parents, but the parents often depend on their children. The image of the elderly man wearing a caftan, who needs the help of his child to make himself understood in the local pharmacy because he does not master our local language, has something humiliating, especially in a social context with a distinct family hierarchy.²

Abstract

Public interpretation and translation services are one of the instruments necessary to establish public and social profit service providers (local authority services, schools, employment agencies, hospitals, welfare organizations, child protection agencies, etc) that are fully equipped to meet the linguistically varied reality of today's and tomorrow's local communities, so that all residents have full access to their rights and so that all legally determined and necessary duties can be communicated to all residents.

Migration and bridging the communication gap: desirability and necessity

Sir Walter Raleigh, England's explorer or buccaneer in the waters of Trinidad and Guiana, made sure there were some Carinepagote Indians for interpretation purposes at his side. He had even taken some of them to England for training.³ Cortés, some eighty years earlier, had his "Malinche". Even the likes of Raleigh and Cortés knew their lives, livelihood and networking depended not merely on up-to-date weaponry, the rage for riches, and amoral daring, but perhaps predominantly on effective communication. Thus, through interpretation, Cortés learnt that the Aztec empire was not as monolithic as the Spanish empire he knew, but was divided by tribute and Flowery Wars⁴.

¹ Maalouf, Amin. *Léon l'Africain*. Paris: Editions Jean-Claude Lattès, 1986, p. 9.

² Scheffer, Paul. *Het land van aankomst*. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2007, p. 24-25. English translation: The land of arrival.

³ Naipaul, V.S., *The Loss of El Dorado. A Colonial History*. Oxford: Picador, 2001, p. 44.

⁴ Meyer, Michael C. and Sherman, William L. *The Course of Mexican History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991 (4: 1979), p. 65 and p. 69. "This concept of *Xochiyaoyotl* (Flowery Wars) [...] demonstrates the expediency of the Aztecs and their neighbors. [...] there was a ritualistic aspect to it as well; a Flowery War was defined by rules [...], the Aztecs and Tlaxcalans eventually got down to the real thing. They became exceedingly bitter enemies, a turn of events that would have ominous

Keen administrators like the Ottomans in the 16th century put the *reis ül-küttab* – the Master of Writers - in charge of relations with foreign powers. The Master of Writers was assisted by another relatively important official - the *First Dragoman*. *Dragomans* or interpreters were generally Christians (at an early stage from European descent).⁵ The mere act of including interpreters from foreign or at least non-Muslim origin into the core of Ottoman administration, illustrates how objectively indispensable they must have been.

Then, as today, whoever crosses their national frontiers in order to negotiate or trade or even wage war, makes sure they speak *the speak* or hires interpreters.

Why then, would matters be different at times when not “we” go out into the world, but when the world comes to us? Migration, like any other cross-border activity, and integration, like any other cross-linguistic form of contact, engenders the need for interpretation and translation.

This essay sets out to show why, in Europe today, the use of interpretation and translation between public and social service providers on the one and citizens on the other hand, is both *desirable and necessary* whenever communication fails due to language diversity.

These last decades, the urban areas of Europe are faced with a significant influx of people in search of opportunities. They come from a wide variety of regions in the world. The influx, welcomed by some and rejected by others, is not likely to subside in the decades to come.

Full-fledged equality – or perhaps more realistically, the reduction of inequality - for all is a programme, a utopia social activists and governments build at. The equalitarian utopia is a far cry from being realized. Whether it will one day be realized or not, we need to ask ourselves from a pragmatic point of view if we *want* to remain consistent with our Western paradigm of participation and access-driven democracy. The paradigm may further crumble if access is (implicitly or explicitly) denied to some just because they are insufficiently familiar with the dominant or official language of a region. We will either be consistent with ourselves or take the risk of undermining the very solidarity-based system that supports us when we ourselves lose our jobs or get ill. My rights can be my rights because they are everyone’s rights. I perform my duties – pay taxes, abide by the law – because everyone is expected to do so. Consequently, access for all is to everyone’s, including my own, advantage. Access to rights and duties, and effective communication to ensure access, is therefore *desirable*.

Equality, and access in particular, for all is both the goal and result of social activism.⁶ Social activism is at the heart of our solidarity-based paradigm of democracy. Parallel

consequences with the arrival of the Spaniards in 1519.”

“Reversals in fortunes simply called for more sacrifices, which eventually brought about a shortage of the “god food”. Hence the resort to Flowery Wars. In order to supply victims, an almost constant state of war was maintained; thus, for religious reasons, militarism was elevated to virtue.”

⁵ Lewis, Bernard. *Istanbul and the Civilization of the Ottoman Empire*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1992 (2: 1963) Dutch translation: *Istanbul en de wereld van het Ottomaanse Rijk*, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bulaaq, 1992, p. 81-82.

to being the result of social activism, access to public and social services, is – to an extent - a product of necessity. Consequently, the creation of conditions that facilitate communication is also a product of necessity. In today's urbanized areas, inhabitants are mutually dependent. Severe illnesses, for example, can spread quickly if preventive health care is not accessible to all. Prevention will be of no avail where collaboration between health care providers and the public is not sustained by effective communication. Access, and therefore effective communication – if required through the use of interpreting and translation -, is a *necessity*.

Access as a strategy to deal with the harmful external effects of physical closeness and functional dependency through glocalization⁷

Migration is of all times, as is language and language diversity. As the world becomes smaller, the languages spoken in a certain area – a country, a region, a city, a neighbourhood, a street - become more numerous and diverse. Antwerp, for example, the city where the author co-ordinates the Antwerp Interpretation and Translation Service, has slightly over 460.000 inhabitants originating from 169 countries and speaking 405 languages⁸, Dutch being the only official language. 26% of the population has a migratory background. 18,4% come from outside the EU. Among migrants, persons of Moroccan origin constitute the largest group, followed by the Dutch, Turks, Poles, migrants from former Yugoslavia, Indians, Congolese, Russians and Western Europeans.

Migration is of all times. In the nineteenth century, for example, Europe's cities expanded rapidly. A growing population was in search of better wages and new homes. This process was further enhanced by the installation of industrial facilities around commercial ports and coal mines.⁹

It is the nature of humans to look for better lives and in order to do so, they are prepared to travel far, to cross as many frontiers as it takes to flee from insufficient living conditions or in search of opportunities to match their ambitions. This phenomenon is quite similar to what is still happening today in many of the major cities of Africa, Asia or Latin America and also to, for example, the Belgian emigrants to France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada or even Congo in the

⁶ Without activism in the 18th century, commoners had not become participants in the system, nor would workers or women have come to fully participate without the activist workers' and women's movements of the 19th and 20th centuries.

⁷ Glocalization: here, the phenomenon that, despite the existence of frontiers and barriers, people from all over the world move temporarily or permanently across wide distances in order to find a better life for themselves and their close-ones. This phenomenon is accompanied by severe social friction – socially, economically, linguistically - perceived to be the result of having to live physically close to people with deviant behaviour, habits and morals. The advent of a variety of newcomers is felt to undermine a structured and thus secure sense of the world. The effects of *global migration* are *felt locally*, in countries, cities, towns, districts, neighbourhoods, even in streets and flats. A global determination of local community life and cohabitation patterns.

⁸ Blommaert, Jan and Van Avermaet, Piet. Taal, onderwijs en de samenleving. De kloof tussen beleid en realiteit. Uitgeverij EPO, 2008, pp. 75. English translation: Language, education and society. The gap between policy and reality.

⁹ De Swaan, Abram. Zorg en de staat. Welzijn, onderwijs en gezondheidszorg in Europa en de Verenigde Staten in de nieuwe tijd. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2004, pp. 127-129. English translation: In Care of the State. Health Care, Education and Welfare in Europe and the USA in the Modern Era (1988).

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁰ As the world is increasingly becoming glocalized, more of these travellers for fortune reach our frontiers and settle in our cities, though most do not travel beyond their own or neighbouring countries' borders. Glocalization is, from a certain perspective like urbanization, the continuous absorption process of immigrants, but also of strife and struggle between a settled population and newcomers. Urbanization through immigration creates extreme physical closeness between members of a population and, consequently, shapes a willy-nilly context of striking mutual functional dependency among inhabitants. It suffices that one inhabitant is contagiously ill, for many to risk getting the same illness.¹¹ Contamination by illnesses likely to cause death, like cholera¹², has objectively called for measures to neutralize contagion as an external effect of urban closeness and functional dependency.¹³ Neutralization of contagion, prevention of epidemics can only be fully effective if the measures are applicable to all *and* are, therefore, accessible for all. Thus, access to clean running water and effective sewerage for all (or most) inhabitants in Western Europe, for example, essentially was the joint and slowly attained result of the recognition of certain collective dangers that, in order to be eliminated effectively, had to be eliminated by "all" for "all".¹⁴ This I-will-be-safe-only-if-all-of-us-are-safe solidarity can of course only take shape when at least the following conditions are fulfilled:

- the presence of strong and well-organized social activism;
- the establishment of a government whose centralized power depends on the population's explicit or active consent;
- the establishment of a government able to enforce 'the law';
- advanced policy making methodologies;
- smart urban planning and keen engineering.

Clean streets, pure tap water and a system of drain pipes, as well as access to health care for all, so that all can remain healthy, are important social achievements as a result of the aforementioned five items and, at the same time, of the necessity to collectively take measures against the undesirable external effects of living closely and interdependently together. In short, access to – public or semi-public - services fulfils collective needs by guaranteeing individual rights (free or cheap access to running water) and imposing individual duties (to pay taxes) within a given community.

¹⁰ Morelli, Anne (Ed.). Les Emigrants belges. Réfugiés de guerre, émigrés économiques, réfugiés politiques ayant quitté nos régions du XVIe siècle à nos jours. Bruxelles: Editions Vie Ouvrière, 1998, pp. 382.

Interesting data and touching details on these Belgian fortune seekers are also available in: Musschoot, Dirk. Wij gaan naar Amerika. Vlaamse landverhuizers naar de nieuwe wereld 1850-1930. Uitgeverij Lannoo, 2002, pp.247. English translation: We are moving to America. Flemish paupers heading for the new world 1850-1930.

¹¹ De Swaan, Abram. Zorg en de staat. Welzijn, onderwijs en gezondheidszorg in Europa en de Verenigde Staten in de nieuwe tijd. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2004, p. 128. English translation: In Care of the State. Health Care, Education and Welfare in Europe and the USA in the Modern Era (1988).

¹² Op. Cit., p. 133.

¹³ Nowadays, "bird flu" and HIV-contagion might be added, as well as TB, which is returning to our cities.

¹⁴ Collective, and later public, measures against negative external effects of mutual dependency as a more effective alternative to gated communities that can never provide more adequate protection than the concept to protect "all by all" when germs are airborne ...

People migrate to where they hope to have better lives. When significant numbers of people migrate to the same places, the population of those places tends to increase. The inhabitants become increasingly interdependent. Because they are mutually dependent, they behave efficiently when they protect themselves as a community against what can harm them collectively. In order for these collective, protective measures to persist, it is essential that access to these measures is equitably distributed and that order is kept by an authority accepted by all. To keep the power of such an authority in check, the authority must be dependent on the people's consent.

In glocalized communities, that are the result of migration and therefore are linguistically diverse, public interpretation and translation services are one of the instruments necessary to establish public and social service providers (local authority services, schools, employment agencies, hospitals, welfare organizations, child protection agencies, etc) that are fully equipped to meet the linguistically varied reality of today's and tomorrow's communities, so that *all* residents have full access to their rights and so that all legally determined and necessary duties can be communicated to all residents. Public and social service interpreting and translation as a policy measure to deal with the external effects of mutual functional dependency through physical closeness among the inhabitants of a certain – often urbanized - area.

Universal needs, universal rights: from ad hoc to structural access

In essence, what people need, all people need and what all people need, they need from each other.

For humans to be able to live, certain social living conditions need to be fulfilled.¹⁵

Humans need:

- a sufficient amount of food on a daily basis;
- shelter;
- protection against violence and disease;
- affection from others;
- to know about the world that surrounds them;
- to be able to keep themselves under control.

Ad hoc initiatives to tentatively and collectively fulfil these universal social needs and integrate as many inhabitants of a region as possible, or at least to be sensitive to the needs of the weaker members of a community, are not restricted to “our” time, nor are they solely intrinsic to “our” Western civilization or to “our” ideological and socio-political scope. Initiatives to integrate “all” or as many as possible were launched before, elsewhere and outside the paradigm of the social security or welfare-based democracy.¹⁶

¹⁵ De Swaan, Abram. *De mensenmaatschappij. Een inleiding*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 1998 (2: 1996), p. 13. English translation: Human society. An introduction.

¹⁶ Knack Magazine, 2 April, 2008, p. 68 (English translation): Until a hundred and some years ago, our hospitals were not hospitals that provided adequate medical care, but rather institutions that functioned predominantly as hospices for palliative care of the severely ill. At the same time, patients were prepared for their life in the hereafter. [...] in these hospitals there were hardly any doctors; they were usually run by head nurses. Also the poor were allowed access to a hospital when they were ill to regain their strength. Most hospitals were the result of private or religious initiative.

When the Arabs, for example, conquered Iraq, they discovered a number of splendid medical facilities, like the Nestorian academy of Gondesjapur. There, the study of medical theory from Galen's texts was combined with actual clinical research at a hospital on the academy's premises. In Iraq, the Arabs quickly began to fathom the usefulness of such facilities. As can be expected, the more prosperous began to use them. Still, in 800 A.D., a hospital that was also accessible to the less well-off was founded in Baghdad by Djibra 'il ibn Bachtisju, a doctor from Gondesjapur, under the initiative and sponsorship of Caliph Harun ar-Rasjid. Similar relatively accessible facilities were founded in 900, 914, 918 and 925 A.D., often by prosperous officials such as viziers who donated large sums to pay for personnel and logistics. From the ninth century onwards, Baghdad's example spreads as hospitals are built in all of the most important provincial centres and accounts from the tenth century even mention some prisons receiving regular visits from doctors and the existence of travelling clinics and pharmacies visiting towns and villages in southern Iraq. Strikingly, in 1284 the Mansuri hospital was founded in a former palace in Cairo. It was said to provide accommodation and sufficient comfort for eight thousand patients. Male and female patients were separated and there were specific sections for the treatment of a variety of diseases like fever, eye diseases, diarrhoea, and a section for surgical treatment. Importantly, the progress in medicine was, already at this early stage, accompanied by that specific tool that helps bridge the communication gap between cultures and languages, namely translation. More than fifty writings on medicine by Rhazes – or rather, Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya ar-Razi (born in 865 A.D. in the neighbourhood of Teheran) - are left to us. His essay on measles and smallpox seems to have been one of his most influential texts, as it was translated into Latin, Greek, French and English. His comprehensive publication on medicine – Al-hawi ("Continens" in Latin) - offered an overall view on the state of medical science in his day, complemented by his own clinical observations. Parts were translated into Latin by a Sicilian Jew in the thirteenth century.¹⁷

However, the concept and creation of the welfare state – due predominantly to the eventually successful activism of workers' movements and leftist political parties in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, simultaneously, the increasing collectivization of the battle against the harmful external effects of urbanization - is our specific Western contribution to the history of the emancipation of man. As in the previous example – Iraq - there also is a universal sense that what is essential for one man, should in ideal circumstances be applicable to all. All humans are entitled to the fulfilment of the basic social needs that were enumerated earlier in the text.

The welfare state differs from the previous examples because it does not depend on 'chance' or, in other words, the charity shown by the mighty and prosperous in search of prestige or loyalty. Access to rights in the welfare state is structurally

¹⁷ Montgomery Watt, W. The influence of Islam on medieval Europe. Edinburgh University Press, 1987 (2: 1972). Dutch translation: Voorbij Poitiers. Arabische invloeden op middeleeuws Europa. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bulaaq, 1992, pp. 48-51.

For readers of Dutch, the following publication on ancient roots of the social welfare concept, is also interesting: Van Dijk, F.H. Sociale zekerheid: ouder dan de weg naar Rome. De vroegste voorbeelden van sociale regelingen. Zutphen: Uitgeversmaatschappij Walburg Pers, 2001. English translation: Social security: older than the road to Rome. The earliest examples of social arrangements.

embedded in legislation and visible through the structured existence of public and social or civil service providers, subsidized by “the state”, for the state thus redistributes wealth. This concept of a fair redistribution of wealth ‘for the people by the people’, to use this image, – by means of the state - is, history reminds us, always obtained through powerful and meticulously organized activism, often with the probability of social upheaval (in itself an undesirable harmful effect of relative physical closeness and mutual dependency) serving as a useful and convincing context.

The implementation of the social security system on a national scale was the most important innovation the process of collectivization brought about in the twentieth century, as a fundamental answer to the basic social and individual needs of humans. For the first time, an increasing portion of the population in Western Europe was integrated in a collective, but also compelling, system in protection against the hazards of workers’ lives. In the late nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the state was able to deploy the administrative know-how and capacity to fulfil this task. Only this externalized agent (elected by also an increasing portion of the population) – the state - had the compelling power to impose taxes and to enforce membership on all. By doing so, the dilemmas of voluntary collective action (horizontal solidarity: for some by some and therefore by definition exclusive) were gradually overcome.¹⁸

Modern societies have solved the problem of violence between their members by monopolizing violence in the hands of the state. They have, through legislation and courts of law, learnt to enforce normative behaviour. The relative absence of violence between members of the same state was a prerequisite for a society based on trade and, eventually, for a predominantly economy-based society to emerge, with the *homo economicus* as its prototype inhabitant.¹⁹ Societies are networks in exchange. In modern economy-based societies, exchange behaviour is essentially perceived in terms of trade, from an economic perspective, in all or at least many aspects of life. The *homo economicus*, then, weighs what is possibly to be gained against the cost, in order to determine whether a “swop” is worthwhile. What is ‘received’ through an exchange will have to be implicitly or explicitly considered by the receiver as valuable enough in comparison to what has been ‘given’. Giving and receiving need to be in balance. When modern societies that have become states enforce a set of norms on their inhabitants, they are durably able to do so, not merely because the state has a monopoly on violence, but because the population, in exchange, has attributed this monopoly to the state so that its social need for ‘protection against violence’ can be answered. For only when the social needs mentioned (the need to be protected, to be safe as one of these needs) are sufficiently fulfilled, people can fully emancipate and thus become mature and genuine participants.

Equal exchange – or at least systems of exchange that are felt to be in balance by all participants in the exchange process - is, in the long run, never equal when the exchange and the implicit or explicit rules that structure the exchange merely depend on the members or member groups of a (modern) society (that has become a state)

¹⁸ De Swaan, Abram. In Care of the State. Op. Cit., p. 224.

¹⁹ Van Vroonhoven, Laurens. *Onderdrukking en Ontwikkeling. Op zoek naar een andere sociologie.* Uitgeverij Damon, 1998, pp. 32-40. English translation: *Oppression and development. In search of a different sociology.*

– horizontal solidarity. The assurance of vertical solidarity (for all by all, through a system of redistribution of wealth) is attributed to and ensured as well as enforced by “the state” or “the authorities”.²⁰ Vertical solidarity is based on asymmetrical relations between the rich and poor, the healthy and sick, young and old and - in broader terms - those that have access to “the system” and those that have none or less. In our context: those who master the dominant language and those who do not.

In exchange for social peace or stability, the welfare state has organized access to living circumstances that sufficiently fulfil the need to have enough food (work or a basic income); to find shelter (housing); protection (the law and law enforcement) and to know the world around us (education); etc.

We have tackled, up to this point, access to public and social services (especially running water, sewerage facilities and health care were evoked) as a cornerstone of modern Western European welfare-based societies, urbanized areas or states. Access as a product of, simultaneously, sustained and organized social action and the collective battle against the harmful external effects of physical closeness between inhabitants of urbanized areas. We have also discovered that access to the welfare system is a strategy to answer intrinsic human social needs. The assurance of vertical solidarity – and thus of equal access for all - is a prerequisite for relative peace and stability in a community, a city, a state. Unequal access leads to duality. Duality may trigger instability and violence.²¹

In today’s European cities and states that are by definition multilingual – even if there is only one official language - the structural government-organized or -financed use of public or social service interpreters and translators is indispensable if access is genuinely to be considered a nuclear government responsibility, which is illustrated by the following covenant example.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights resolution of 1966, a UN treaty ratified by over 150 countries worldwide [...], states in article 12 that “The State Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health”, and mentions as one of the steps to be taken to achieve the full realization of this right the “creation of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness”. By virtue of article 2.2 and article 3, the Covenant proscribes any discrimination in access to health care and underlying determinants of health, as well as to means and entitlements for their procurement on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, [...].²²

²⁰ Komter, Aafke, Burgers, Jack and Engbersen, Godfried. Het cement van de samenleving. Een verkennende studie over solidariteit en cohesie. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000, p. 45-60. English translation: The society’s cement. Exploring solidarity and cohesion.

²¹ Not in some remote area of Africa but in nearby Naples (Italy), this time, we have recently seen what the deterioration or mere absence of the state can lead to: waste piling up to such an extent that resident and live stock health is affected; the Mafia acting at will; etc. (March, April ... 2008!)

²² PASS International vzw, Partner for Applied Social Sciences. Is the use of interpreters in medical consultations justified. A critical review of the literature. Brussels: COFETIS-FOSOVET asbl, Coordination Fédérale de la Traduction et de l’Interprétariat Social, March 2008, p.4. (www.cofetis.be)

Evidence shows that the use of interpreters in medical consultations is beneficial to both the patient who does not master the dominant language used (patients with LALP of limited autochthonous language proficiency) and to the health care system.²³

One example: the city of Antwerp invests in public and social service interpretation and translation since 1982

Official estimates indicate that today about 169 nationalities dwell in the city of Antwerp. Therefore, Antwerp's local government invests in Dutch learning programmes, for immigrants settling in Antwerp obviously benefit from learning the local language. Still, learning a language takes time. Many enrol in the Dutch language courses, but there is not enough room for everyone to enrol at the same time. Many public and social service language contexts are too complex for learners to cope with. And local decision makers all know (or should all know by now) that immigration will not subside tomorrow. Thus, it is a priority to offer Dutch language courses to immigrants and at the same time there is an obvious need to provide interpreters and translators if public and social servants are expected to do their jobs adequately in linguistically diverse local communities. Today, Belgium's Federal Consultative Body for Social Interpretation and Translation ("Fosovet" in Dutch or "Cofetis" in French), located in Brussels, provides funding – through a European "EQUAL" project - for scientific research on the objective need for interpretation and translation for public and social services in Belgium.²⁴

Learning programmes of the national tongue – Spanish in Spain, Dutch or French in the different regions of Belgium - need focal attention from policy makers, for command of the local language helps migrants become more independent in their new environment. Still, those who continue to entertain the idea of harmoniously monolingual local communities are naïve or Machiavellian, perhaps in search of public applause.²⁵

Already in 1982, the municipal council of Antwerp decided to set up a public interpretation service so that social profit organizations located in Antwerp could aptly provide services to all inhabitants of our city, also those who did not master Dutch. Back then, only a handful of interpreters - especially in Arabic, Berber and Turkish- were available.

²³ Op. Cit., p. 7 and p. 20:

p. 7: Professional interpreters: 1. Increase comprehension of medical recommendations/ 2. Reduce the risk of medical errors related to incorrect translations/ 3. Increase trust and motivation (and therefore can increase adherence)/ 4. Are the best option to maximize comprehension of *informed consent* and to ensure *confidentiality* for LALP patients.

p. 20: If the intervention of an interpreter helps to prevent one case of diabetic foot with gangrene, due to the increased quality of care and preventive measures, his yearly full time salary (€ 40.000, Cofetis, 2007) is fully recovered in avoided medical costs to the NHC.

²⁴ Research results are now available (in Dutch) via www.fosovet.be or www.cofetis.be.

²⁵ Data from the "Huis van het Nederlands Antwerpen" (a centre in charge of the co-ordination of Dutch learning programs for immigrants) provided by e-mail to the author (in March 2007) indicate that in Antwerp the number of enrolments into Dutch learning programs has increased from about 4,500 in 1996 to over 12,000 in 2004. The number of interpretation and translation hours provided by the Antwerp Interpretation and Translation Service has also increased from 5,527 hours in 2002, over 9,254 hours in 2007, to 10,700 hours in 2008). Consequently, there seems to be little or no correlation between learning the national tongue and the need for translation in the context of migration.

Today, Antwerp's Interpretation and Translation Service provides around 10,000 hours of interpretation and translation work, on a yearly basis, and deploys 65 interpreters and/or translators for about 30 languages (Albanian, Arabic (Modern Standard as well as several regional versions), Berber, Armenian, Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Danish, Dari, Farsi, German, English, French, Hindi, Italian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Ukrainian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Slovak, Spanish, Tibetan, Czech, Turkish, Urdu). Over 35% of these translation and interpretation operations are set in primary and secondary schools, to pick only one example, and constitute in effect a methodology to get parents who do not (sufficiently) master Dutch involved in their children's school career. For, it is simply impossible to have a sensible conversation in the tower of Babel on learning difficulties, teaching contents and objectives, special needs, pupil behaviour, truancy or on how to further develop youngsters' skills without the support of interpreters. It is common knowledge – in particular among education experts - that parent involvement is a determining factor for a successful schooling career.

Conclusion: interpretation and translation as indispensable tools in welfare-based democracies to ensure accessibility of civil rights and duties for all

In today's cities and nations, access to civil or human right products must be the same for all inhabitants, whichever their nationality, race, gender, social status or language. Unequal access to public or social services and institutions leads to a dual society.

Democracy is not just a technique through which, by means of free elections, representatives are chosen. Democracy first and foremost stands for the importance of each individual with his or her inalienable, inherent rights. These individual rights are meaningless if they are not enveloped in a society where full access to these rights is guaranteed. Art. 23 of – for example - the Belgian Constitution specifies these rights (which are similar throughout the EU).²⁶ These rights can only be

²⁶ Belgian Constitution, Art. 23

Everyone has the right to lead a life in conformity with human dignity. To this end, the laws, decrees and rulings alluded to in Article 134 guarantee, taking into account corresponding obligations, economic, social and cultural rights, and determine the conditions for exercising them.

These rights include notably:

1° the right to employment and to the free choice of a professional activity in the framework of a general employment policy, aimed among others at ensuring a level of employment that is as stable and high as possible, the right to fair terms of employment and to fair remuneration, as well as the right to information, consultation and collective negotiation;

2° the right to social security, to health care and to social, medical and legal aid;

3° the right to have decent accommodation;

4° the right to enjoy the protection of a healthy environment;

5° the right to enjoy cultural and social fulfilment.

guaranteed to everyone when their products are accessible to everyone, whether beneficiaries sufficiently command the national language or not. Democracy is genuine and effective when it is genuine and effective in its most concrete appearance. Locally, via its December 2006 Political Agreement, the new local government of Antwerp guarantees full access to civil rights for everyone who “usually and with respect of the law” stays in Antwerp.²⁷

Teachers teach. Local authority civil servants want to make sure that residents receive or hand in the exact official documents that are legally necessary, containing the correct data, when they want to get married, move or have to meet other formal requirements. Social workers accompanying clients in budget control want their clients to learn how to manage their own budgets. Doctors and therapists provide treatment in order to cure their patients or clients or to alleviate pain. These and other professional service providers do not aspire to talk about the service they provide, they just want to provide it. And they want to provide it efficiently, and by doing so they ensure the accessibility of civil rights. But if they cannot talk to a number of parents of pupils, residents, clients or patients, efficiency and mere customer-friendliness turn out to be hollow concepts, for our cities, our nations, our EU-regions are indeed becoming increasingly linguistically diverse. Political leadership, from a pragmatic but also democratic viewpoint, must take this or continue to take this into consideration. For when social security-based systems become insecure and unstable by way of duality, they tend to become insecure and unstable for an increasing number of beneficiaries. Duality of (local) societies leads to structural (social) insecurity.

It is therefore suitable to conclude by underlining the importance of the Political Recommendations for the Sector of Social Interpreting and Translation, and more specifically the five resolutions that were formulated during the final conference on 18 and 19 October 2007 in Brussels, within the context of the TRIALOG Transnational Co-operation Agreement, for a long-term vision on how to structurally embed public and social service interpretation and translation, will not merely focus on national but predominantly on European legislation:²⁸

Resolution 1: Recognize social translation and interpreting as necessary tools for an EU integration policy that stands for diversity and equal opportunities;

Resolution 2: Guarantee the right to qualitative language assistance in a social context, including public service provision. This right must evolve from a right in principle to a legally enforceable right;

Resolution 3: Implement a European quality standard for social translation and interpreting;

²⁷ Bestuursakkoord / Political Agreement – Antwerp 2007-2012, Social Policy, pp. 48-50

²⁸ Cofetis asbl/Fosovet vzw. Political Recommendations for the Sector of Social Interpreting and Translation. October 2007, www.cofetis.be.

The resolutions and recommendations are the result of the Transnational Cooperation Agreement TRIALOG. The partners of TRIALOG’s “social translation and interpreting” working group have maintained contact with other social translation and interpretation services, notably in Belgium, France, Switzerland and Germany.

Resolution 4: Recognize and fund social translation and interpreting services;

Resolution 5: Support consultation and partnership structures at various levels: European, national, regional.

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Short biography author

Pascal Rillof (°1964), is the co-ordinator of the Antwerp Interpretation and Translation Service since 2003. He is a member of the board of the Belgian Federal Consultative Body for Community Interpreting and Translation ("Cofetis") and a member of the Flemish Circle of Community Interpretation and Translation Services for Quality Improvement ("KwaliteitsKring").

He has a Master's in Translation Studies (Dutch-English, Spanish, Optional language: Arabic) and is a trained teacher.

He has formerly worked as a translator and as an English lecturer at the HoChiMinh University of Education, where he published the seminar paper "Toward a more Process Oriented Approach to Language Learning". He was also in charge of a Dutch learning programme for Turkish learners and he co-ordinated the "Céllule de néerlandais" for the educational inspectorate of the "Département du Nord" in northern France.

Contact

Pascal Rillof | Co-ordinator
City of Antwerp | Social Affairs | Atlas

Antwerp Interpretation and Translation Service
Carnotstraat 110 | B-2060 Antwerpen
tel 0032 3 338 70 95
fax 0032 3 338 70 98
pascal.rillof@stad.antwerpen.be



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