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Public service interpreting in educational settings

Issues of politeness and interpersonal relationships

Mireia Vargas-Urpi

Abstract

This chapter focuses on an application of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to the analysis of interpreters' renditions in educational settings. It bases on the analysis of examples extracted from a small corpus of ten transcripts (five in the Chinese–Catalan combination and five in the Arabic–Catalan combination) of recorded role-plays, which simulated an interpreted parent–teacher meeting in a Catalan secondary school. The chapter focuses on the comparison of politeness strategies in original utterances and their corresponding renditions. It explores whether politeness strategies were maintained, adapted, omitted or added in the interpreters' renditions. The results of the analysis suggest that, despite the important value of politeness strategies in terms of interpersonal meaning, interpreters tended to omit original politeness strategies and focused on the informative meaning of original utterances. Interpreters rarely added or modified politeness strategies.

ORCID: Mireia Vargas Urpi 0000-0001-6302-581X

Introduction

Public service interpreting (PSI) is still a relatively young field of enquiry; however, a considerable body of research has emerged in relation to settings such as healthcare, court or police. By contrast, research into the kind of interpreting that takes place in educational settings and that seeks to enable oral communication between parents and guardians with limited competence in the local language and teachers in charge of their children is much scarcer.[1] In other words, among all the settings that constitute what has been labelled as PSI, educational establishments are perhaps among the least explored to date. Tipton and Furmanek (2016) devote a whole chapter of their guide on dialogue interpreting to educational interpreting and acknowledge that "there are few studies involving authentic interpreted parent–teacher interactions" (2016: 175). Perhaps as a result of this lack of authentic data, the application of pragmatics has also been limited in this subfield.

One of the few scholars to have explored what happens in parent–teacher interactions is Davitti (2012, 2013), whose pioneering research is based on the analysis of three authentic, naturally occurring interpreter-mediated parent–teacher meetings. Davitti's study is not explicitly positioned as pragmatically-oriented, but she uses conversation analysis to analyse the sample of interactions, integrating elements of non-verbal language (such as the study of gaze among the interlocutors) to describe how interpreters position themselves in such mediated interactions. Other authors that have explored interpreting in educational settings based on the transcription of authentic interpreter-mediated dialogues are Vargas-Urpi and Arumí (2014) and Vargas-Urpi (2015, 2017). Vargas-Urpi and Arumí (2014) present a case study that applies Wadensjö's (1998) taxonomy of renditions in the analysis of interpreters' strategies when faced with specific problems. Vargas-Urpi (2015) focuses on dialogue coordination and power issues in interpreter-mediated multi-party encounters, and Vargas-Urpi (2017) compares interpreter and mediator roles using Davitti's (2013) notions of user assimilation and user empowerment. While traces of pragmatic phenomena can be observed in these studies, they are not explicitly mentioned in any of them.[2]

As for the influence of pragmatics in PSI research, Valero Garcés' review of linguistics-based research in PSI revealed that "studies based on the theories and

methodology of Applied Linguistics and more particularly the pragmatic paradigm, are still too few and too new" (2006: 98). More than 10 years after that publication, certain concepts from pragmatics have become common in PSI research. For example, reference to face, facework, politeness moves, relevance or illocutionary force are frequent, but this is typically accompanied by limited critical engagement with the theoretical programmes in which these concepts originated. Nevertheless, as Mason (2015: 305) observes, "pragmatics-based research in interpreting studies has far from exhausted its field of enquiry".

This chapter focuses on an application of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to the analysis of interpreters' renditions in educational settings, supported by Mason and Stewart's (2001: 51) hypothesis that "issues of politeness and other interactional pragmatic variables are crucial to an understanding of what is involved in dialogue interpreting events". Thus, the chapter provides and analyses original examples that illustrate how politeness theory – as postulated by Brown and Levinson – can be used to account for interpreters' renditions in educational settings. "Translational shifts" in this chapter refer to any kind of deviations from the original utterance, i.e., omissions, additions, changes in meaning or register. Special emphasis will be placed on translational shifts that change the pragmatic meaning of the original utterances. This study also seeks to ascertain whether there might be a correlation between these translational shifts and face-threating acts (FTA), which will be further described in the following section.

2. Politeness and face

To understand Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, the concept of "face" must first be defined. According to Goffman's (1967: 5) seminal definition, face is "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact". For Goffman, face is related to the feelings a person experiences when in contact with others. It depends on social values and is part of the rituals of human interaction.

Drawing on Goffman, Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) define "face" as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself". According to them, people "cooperate (and assume each other's cooperation) in maintaining face in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face". Considering that

participants in a given interaction are generally assumed to be rational and want to protect each other's face, they will try to avoid or at least mitigate acts that threaten the other's face: politeness strategies will then be used as a reaction to these face-threatening acts (FTAs).

Brown and Levinson set out an extensive repertoire of linguistic politeness strategies, which vary depending on the nature of the FTA (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 68). For instance, in certain situations, a speaker may switch to in-group language or dialect to convey in-group membership, or he or she may use a joke to claim common empathy; while in other situations, the speaker may use an indirect question instead of a direct request to avoid coercing the hearer, or may introduce a hedge for that same purpose, among other strategies.

While Brown and Levinson's approach is linguistically-oriented, Goffman's approach is sociological. According to Goffman (1955), facework can be classified into two processes: avoidance processes (strategies to avoid potential face-threatening situations and people), and corrective processes (which may be used after an unavoidable face-threatening situation). Context and sociological variables are also important in the application of Brown and Levinson's theory. According to these authors (1987: 74), three factors determine the level of politeness in an interaction:

- power distance between interlocutors, i.e., the vertical dimension of the social relation, which takes into account the social status of the interlocutors;

- social distance, which considers the level of familiarity between interlocutors;

- absolute rank of imposition of the FTA, which considers that some impositions might be more serious than others, and thus might demand more mitigating strategies to redress the FTA.

Both Goffman's and Brown and Levinson's theories have influenced research in PSI and dialogue interpreting in general. There are other politeness theories, e.g. Lakoff's (1973) politeness principle, Leech's (1983) politeness maxims, Scollon and Scollon's (1995) intercultural communication theory or Spencer-Oatey's (2000/2008) theory of rapport management, among others. However, as Pöllabauer (2015: 212) explains, in PSI and dialogue interpreting research, "most authors have adopted qualitative

discourse analytical approaches, with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as the preferred theoretical framework".

In general terms, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory has received criticism for its claim of "universality" in relation to the concept of face (see also Mapson, this volume). Hsu (2010: 110), comparing politeness strategies in commercial letters in Chinese and Spanish, explains that several Asian scholars question the universal value of "face" as suggested by Brown and Levinson, as it may be regarded differently in individualist and collectivist societies. Spencer-Oatey (2008) also highlights a Western bias in Brown and Levinson's theory, as she claims that the term "face" in their work only takes account of the needs of the individual and is thus lacking in terms of the perspective of the hearer/receiver. Spencer-Oatey's (2008: 12) theory of rapport management seeks to overcome this bias by introducing the "management of social relationships" as an aspect of language. She examines "the way that language is used to construct, maintain and/or threaten social relationships but […] it also includes the management of sociality rights and interactional goals" (ibid.). In other words, in human interactions, harmony (or "rapport", to use the author's terminology) can also be at risk if any of the interlocutor's sociality rights are threatened. Spencer-Oatey (2005: 336) explores "the bases on which people make their social judgements in authentic interactions", while Brown and Levinson focus on "the choices that speakers make" in terms of linguistic strategies.

Despite being a more comprehensive approach to politeness, the theory of rapport management has had limited application in interpreting studies. One of the few studies that draw on Spencer-Oatey's approach is Monacelli's (2009) analysis of authentic interpreted conference speeches. Monacelli (2009: 462) holds that the interpreter is "in a position of managing a rapport between ST speaker and TT audience". Despite being a pioneering contribution in the field of conference interpreting, the application of the rapport management theory is limited, as Monacelli only focuses on what she calls "interactional linguistic facework" (i.e., politeness strategies such as omissions, additions, weakeners and strengtheners) and does not include other variables that are also important in Spencer-Oatey's approach (e.g. sociality or association rights).

3. Studies in PSI based on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory

This section reviews some of the studies that have taken Brown and Levinson's politeness theory as their theoretical framework.

Krouglov's (1999) study on police interpreting reflects some of the benefits of this linguistic approach. He draws on Brown and Levinson's subdivision of hedges to analyse a police interpreter's renditions from Russian into English, concluding that a lack of interpreter awareness of pragmatic functions of hedges in both source and target languages resulted in shifts in the nature of the speech event. For example, the interpreter had changed the Russian particle *nu*, used as an intensifier in the specific turn that was analysed, for the English *well*, which showed hesitation in the rendition. Krouglov concludes that these shifts in the pragmatic value of original utterances "misrepresent the speaker or make a witness's testimony seem less certain or more definite" (1999: 286).

Politeness strategies are part of the interpersonal meaning exchanged in a dialogue, as also are attempts to actively threaten the interlocutor's face. Mason and Stewart (2001) conducted a study based on the analysis of examples of dialogue interpreting events that had been broadcast on television. They compared the more literal style used in court interpreting with a freer, less regulated style used in immigration service interviews. They identified various examples of translational shifts in the renditions of FTAs, but concluded that "while the literal style of interpreting does not necessarily suppress interpersonal meaning, the freer, less regulated style does not necessarily preserve it" (2001: 68). For example, changing a question from "How is it that you're still in this country?" to "Why are you still here?" may not affect the recipient's response, but it does modify the "unfolding relationship between primary participants", as Mason and Stewart (2001: 67–68) observe.

Cambridge (1999) also applied Brown and Levinson's concept of face to the analysis of a sample of simulated medical consultations with volunteer interpreters. Even though Cambridge (1999: 216) observes that "[t]he doctors who took part in the study appear to be well aware of both face threats and gender issues, and [are] very practised at minimizing or avoiding them", certain aspects in the conversation did constitute FTAs,

either to the patient or to the volunteer interpreter. Taboo words were an interesting example of FTAs impacting on the interpreter who was seen not to use certain words (e.g. "penis" or "discharge") to avoid losing face. Even though Cambridge introduces Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and their definition of "face", neither is systematically critically evaluated, which may be considered one of the limitations of her study. Instead, Cambridge considers that miscommunication is more related to unfamiliarity of untrained interpreters with the routines of medical consultations, or insufficient command of lexicon.

Another interesting contribution that provides interesting examples of how issues of face surface in dialogue interpreting events concerns Pöllabauer's (2004) study on authentic asylum hearings in Graz. The descriptive approach reveals the interpreters' employment of face-saving strategies, which become especially relevant when switching from direct style to reported speech to "clearly mark the authorship of the questions/statements" (2004: 165). She also explains that "if the interpreters' own face is in danger, they may use comments to assign responsibility for the misunderstanding". For example, one interpreter clearly marked the authorship of the original utterance ("The officer says …"), instead of using first person, to detach from an offensive statement. Even though the notions of "face", "face-work" and "face-saving strategies" are important and recurring elements in Pöllabauer's analysis, the author does not really critically engage with Brown and Levison's politeness theory or Goffman's definition of face, but only refers to them to support the explanation of a specific example in her study. In other words, Pöllabauer's contribution provides valuable practical examples for the study of face in dialogue interpreting, but is limited in its critical engagement with the theoretical programmes behind key concepts.

Despite these examples – which are by no means exhaustive – of studies in PSI that explicitly draw on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, the concept of politeness and face are seldom the main object of study in PSI research. More often, they just "surface in works primarily concerned with other issues", as Mason and Stewart (2001: 51) observe, quoting the examples of Harris and Sherwood (1978), Knapp-Pothoff and Knapp (1987) and Berk-Seligson (1990). Although, as this section has highlighted, several studies have been published since Mason and Stewart's observation in 2001,

there are many aspects of politeness theory that merit further attention in interpreting studies.

4. Approach and methodology

This chapter draws on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to account for translational shifts in interpreters' renditions in a small corpus of transcriptions of role-plays of an interpreted parent–teacher meeting. More specifically, the study analyses interpreters' renditions in the context of FTAs.

4.1. The original project

This chapter is based on the analysis of examples extracted from ten transcripts (five in the Chinese–Catalan combination and five in the Arabic–Catalan combination) of simulated role-plays of an interpreted parent–teacher meeting. The data collection took place in the context of a broader research project that sought to analyse problems and strategies in PSI settings. [3] The original project used transcriptions to compare interpreters' management of particular issues in cross-cultural interaction (e.g. cultural aspects, long turns, incoherent replies, etc.).

Ten public service interpreters or intercultural mediators working in Catalonia were invited to participate in three role-plays (cf. Gil-Bardají, 2016; Arumí & Vargas-Urpi, 2017; Arumí, 2018). In Catalonia, both public service interpreters and intercultural mediators enable communication between users and public service providers (see Vargas-Urpi, 2013; Arumí, 2017), which is the reason why both were invited to participate in the study. The main differences between these two role profiles is that intercultural mediators can take on other assignments not related to interpreting (e.g. user counselling), and they are not required to observe strict role boundaries. Therefore, they often become active participants when enabling communication. The boundaries between both professional profiles are fuzzy in real practice, though (see Arumí, 2017).

This contribution focuses on one of the role-plays, which simulated a parent–teacher meeting in a Catalan secondary school. The interpreters and mediators participated in two other simulated meetings as well, and in a retrospective interview. The retrospective interviews did not include questions concerning FTAs or politeness issues but were more concerned with the overall objectives of the original project. For this reason, retrospective interviews are not discussed here.

4.2. *The script for the role-play*

The script for the role-play discussed in this chapter was based on a real meeting described and analysed in Vargas-Urpi and Arumí (2014). In this meeting, a Catalan teacher and a Chinese mother of a 16-year-old student meet to discuss the options for the student to continue studying, as he was about to finish compulsory education. There are certain potentially face-threatening acts both in the original meeting and in the transcript of the role-play, because the teacher tells the mother that the student has failed some subjects (Catalan and Spanish) and tries to convince her that her son would be better to pursue vocational training instead of high school (baccalaureate), which was the option that the mother prefers.

Two versions of this same role-play script were prepared: Catalan–Chinese and Catalan–Arabic. The teachers' utterances were the same in both versions. The mother's responses, which were originally in Chinese in the real situation, were translated and adapted for the Arabic version of the script. Cultural elements were taken into account: for instance, in the Arabic version, the mother answers *inshallah* (إن شاء الله "God willing") when the teacher says that she hopes the student will pass the course.

4.3. Mise-en-scène*, recording and transcription of the role-plays*

In the role-plays, a member of the research team played the role of the Catalan teacher. The role of the mother was played by a Chinese collaborator of the research group in the Chinese–Catalan encounter, and by a Moroccan collaborator in the other encounter. The interactions were video-recorded with a static camera. The data collection took place from April to July 2013 (the Chinese sample) and from February to June 2014 (the Arabic sample).

The recordings were then transcribed for analysis. The transcriptions were created verbatim (word by word) and included a limited repertoire of symbols adapted from Jefferson's (2004) transcription system (see Table 17.1). The transcriptions also included comments on non-verbal features when they were relevant to understand the interpreters' performance. Back translations from Chinese and Arabic into Catalan were provided by research assistants in order to facilitate the analysis by other members of the research team.

[Insert Table 17.1 Transcription symbols used in the study, adapted from Jefferson (2004) here]

Table 18.1

Transcription symbols used in the study, adapted from Jefferson (2004)

Symbol	Meaning
=	Latched speech, a continuation of talk
[	Overlapping speech
(.)	Short pause
(x)	Hesitation
:::	Elongated speech, a stretched sound

4.4. Approach and analysis

The analysis of the transcriptions of renditions by ten IMs in virtually exactly the same situation is useful for generating hypotheses. Due to space limitations, three instances have been selected for analysis here: the opening phase of the conversation, which is important because it helps establish the relationship and hierarchy among participants (i.e., power and social distance), and two examples of FTAs (conveying bad news and discouraging the interlocutor).

The analysis of the transcriptions mainly focuses on the textual dimension of the interpreted dialogue, i.e., it compares original utterances and their renditions. Due to the limitations of the transcription, it cannot be considered a multimodal analysis, as it does not take into account non-verbal aspects such as tone or intonation. Some extracts of this role-play have been discussed in other publications (e.g. Vargas-Urpi & Arumí, 2014; Arumí & Vargas-Urpi, 2017), but they are revisited here from the perspective of politeness theory.

The analysis seeks to address three main questions:

a) How are politeness strategies in original utterances conveyed in the renditions, if at all?

b) Do interpreters and mediators add politeness strategies that were not present in the original utterances?

c) How is face given or maintained in the renditions?

The choice of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is driven by two main considerations. First, the chapter focuses on the perspective of the speaker and how interpreters and mediators maintain, adapt or omit politeness strategies present in original utterances. The approach is both linguistic and sociological: while linguistic choices are the main object of analysis, sociological variables as foreseen in Brown and Levinson's theory (1987: 74) will also be considered. Second, the chapter seeks to reflect general trends in pragmatically-oriented research in PSI. In this respect, Brown and Levinson's approach is invoked on the basis of its influence to date.

4.5. *The interpreters and mediators in the study*

All of the interpreters and intercultural mediators that participated in the study were practitioners at the time of the data collection. There were eight intercultural mediators, one public service interpreter and one participant that worked as both an intercultural mediator and public service interpreter. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, the term interpreter-mediator (IM) will be used to refer to all participants, as boundaries are fuzzy between both role profiles.

The participants' education and experience were diverse. All were educated to degree level: four in Translation and Interpreting Studies,[4] three in Philology, and three in non-language related degrees (such as Tourism or Law). Only two participants (one in the Arabic sample and one in the Chinese sample) had undertaken specific training in PSI.

The IMs in the Arabic sample had more experience in the fields of PSI or intercultural mediation: between 9 and 16 years. The experience of the IMs in the Chinese sample ranged from 2 to 8 years. All the IMs of the Arabic sample were born in Morocco. In the Chinese sample, three IMs were born in Spain and two in China.

All the IMs were asked to approach the assignment as they would do in their daily work. This was the only guideline given to the participants.

5. A pragmatic description of the context of the study

In the context of the encounter simulated in the study (PSI between a Catalan teacher and Chinese or Moroccan mothers), the sociological variables (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 74) that determine the choice of politeness strategies may be described as follows.

5.1. Power distance

The power distance (vertical dimension of the social relation) between primary participants (i.e., the teacher and parents) is shorter than in other PSI settings, such as court, police or healthcare interpreting. In educational settings, the power distance may be attenuated by the fact that both participants pursue the same objective: the successful education of children as a means towards their inclusion in the new country of residence. Both the teacher's and parents' views "are equally important and it is only by merging them [i.e., considering them both] that it is possible to gain a comprehensive picture of the child's attitude and behavior with a view to identifying a joint solution" (Davitti, 2013: 176).

Nevertheless, there is still institutional asymmetry between the teacher – who is a member of the dominant group and a member of the institution, and who is providing a service for the parents by educating and taking care of their children – and the parents – who are members of the migrated community, who may have limited knowledge of the new country of residence and of institutional functioning, and who need the service provided by the teacher. This hierarchy may be foregrounded by the participants' perception of the power-distance relation and their respective cultural backgrounds.[5]

5.2. Social distance

Social distance is intermediate: not high, not low. Typically, teachers and parents are not complete strangers (as it may be the case in other PSI settings), but they do not share the familiarity of close friends or relatives.

5.3 Absolute rank of imposition

The absolute rank of imposition in conversations that take place in educational settings strongly depends on the subject being discussed. A meeting to talk about a student's bad behaviour, for example, is potentially more face-threatening than one to discuss his or her good academic performance. Pillet-Shore (2002: 5, cited in Davitti, 2013: 175)

explains that "teachers seem to work to reconcile this tension between […] reporting trouble and maintaining the sociable character of these conferences", which suggests that teachers may be relatively aware of potential FTAs and thus seek to mitigate or avoid them, as was the case of the doctors described by Cambridge (1999) and cited above. In the role-play object of study, this tension is also evident: the teacher seems to seek a balance between good and bad news or, in other words, between giving or threatening face.

6. Translational shifts in the IM's renditions

This section shows examples of how Brown and Levinson's politeness theory may be applied to the analysis of PSI in educational settings. It focuses on three instances extracted from the role-plays, as already explained before.

6.1. Conversation opening

The conversation opening is important when applying Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, because it reflects the interpersonal relationship that is established between interlocutors, including the degrees of power and social distance. Excerpt 1 shows the first turn of the role-play, an utterance in Catalan by the teacher.

> **Excerpt 1.** Conversation opening by the teacher (original utterance)
>
> Doncs bé, com que en aquesta ocasió la reunió l'ha demanada ella, m'agradaria saber si hi ha algun aspecte concret que vol parlar, que vol comentar...
>
> [Back translation] *So, well, since this time this meeting has been requested by her, I'd like to know if there's any specific thing she wants to talk about or she wants to comment on …*

The teacher uses a discourse marker (*doncs bé*; "so, well") to start with her first turn in the conversation, provides a justification for her next question and then uses an indirect request with a modal verb (*m'agradaria saber*; I'd like to know) to ask the mother for the reason of the meeting. She uses the third person (she) to refer to the mother and addresses the utterance to the interpreter. This first turn is rather formal and polite: the inclusion of the justification and the use of the modal verb and the indirect question possibly seek to mitigate a potential FTA if the question had been too direct or coercive.

The following excerpts (2–5) present the renditions by four IMs of the Chinese sample.

Excerpt 2. Rendition of the conversation opening by IM1

IM1:　　　哦好像是(.)　班主任说就是今天就是开家就是这个会这个会就是你来你要开的，　是吗？你有什么问题？要说什么？

[Back translation] *Ah, it seems that (.) the tutor says that today, that is, this family meeting, this this meeting is because you wanted to have it, right? Do you have any questions? What do you want to talk about?*

Excerpt 3. Rendition of the conversation opening by IM2

IM2:　　　你好，　是这样吧。因为这次面谈是你自己申请的，我们想问你你来这里的主要原因是什么？

[Back translation] *Hi, look. Since this interview it was you who requested it, we'd like to ask you what is the main reason for you to come here?*

Excerpt 4. Rendition of the conversation opening by IM3

IM3:　　　老师想知道因为你是申请跟她见个面对吧？跟她讲话。她想知道有什么事情，你有什么问题要问她：：：

[Back translation] *The teacher would like to know, because you requested to meet with her, right? To talk to her. She'd like to know what happens, do you have questions you want to ask her:::*

Excerpt 5. Renditions of the conversation opening by IM4

IM4:　　　　　　她说这次是你申请的嘛申请跟她会面嘛，她说你是不是要跟她说什么事情？

[Back translation] *She says that this time you requested, eh, you requested to meet with her, she says do you want to talk about something with her?*

Three IMs use reported speech to signal the author of the utterance instead of switching to direct speech as is often recommended in PSI. Two of them even include the position

of the first interlocutor (they refer to her as "the tutor" or "the teacher"), which seems to emphasize the hierarchy in the interaction. By contrast, IM2 uses the first-person plural (we), thus aligning with the teacher. Had it been a naturally-occurring interaction, this alignment might have distanced the IM from the user.

All of the IMs reproduce the teacher's justification – and thus maintain the politeness strategy –, but two of them (IM1 and IM4) omit the modal verb (*I'd like to*) and use direct questions to the mother – IM4 being especially coercive, as the construction 是不是 (literally, "yes or no") emphasises the polarity of the question in Chinese. On the other hand, the addition of discourse markers which seek to request confirmation by the mother (是吗？， 对吧？；"right?") may be regarded as a new politeness strategy that did not appear in the original utterance and that seeks agreement from the interlocutor (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 112).

The fifth IM of the Chinese sample had a very different reaction to the first original utterance by the teacher, as may be observed in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 6. IM5's non-renditions after the conversation opening

IM5:   Eh::: Com et dius, perdona?

Eh::: Sorry, what's your name? (to the teacher, in Catalan)

Teacher: Em dic Maria.

My name is Maria.

IM5:   啊， 她就是您的小孩子的班主任，她叫 Maria，是吗？Maria 老师

Eh, this is your child's tutor, her name is Maria, right? Professor Maria.

Mother: 很高兴认识你

Pleased to meet you.

IM5:   Encantada.

            Pleased to meet you.

Teacher: Igualment.

Pleased to meet you too.

IM5:   Ehm::: Bueno, ella està preocupada una mica per la seva filla i voldria saber com es porta a l'escola, o sigui, què fa, i la seva situació més actual i com està.

Ehm::: Well, she's a bit worried about her daughter and she'd like to know how she behaves at school, that is, what she does, and her current situation and how she is.

In the previous excerpt, non-renditions[6] prevail in IM5's turns. IM5, who was used to working as an intercultural mediator, asked to have a brief meeting alone with the mother before the start of the parent–teacher meeting. In that previous meeting, she had already asked the reason for that day's meeting, which is why she can provide the information in the last turn of excerpt 6 without asking the mother. It is interesting that IM5 completely omits the first utterance by the teacher and, instead, tries to "create an appropriate atmosphere" (Davitti, 2013: 171) for the interview, as is usual in intercultural mediation: she asks for the teacher's name to introduce her to the Chinese mother, putting emphasis on her position ("tutor") and using the common form of address in Chinese (Maria 老师, "professor Maria"), even though the teacher does not understand what the mediator is saying. The polite response by the mother ("Pleased to meet you") is interpreted to the teacher, but the teacher's polite reply is not ("Pleased to meet you too"), which reflects that the mediator has a complete control of which politeness strategies are exchanged during the interaction.

Excerpts 7–11 present the renditions by the five IMs of the Arabic sample. Two IMs use reported speech (IM6 and IM7), while the others use third person without reported speech. There are two IMs that may have had problems in understanding the meaning of the original utterance (IM6 and IM10) as they produced distorted renditions.

Excerpt 7. Rendition of the conversation opening by IM6

آآ...قالت ليك بأن حيت هاد المرة هي:::، هي اللي عيطت ليك لل باش تهدر على:::، على بنتك اولا على ولدك، وإذا كان عندك شي::: شي حاجة باغة ت تسوليها أولا باغة تهدري معاها(.) على شي حاجة شاغلة بالك

IM6: *A:::, she says that this time it has been her::: it has been her who called you to talk about your daughter or son, to see if you have any::: doubts or something you want to tell her (.) something that worries you.*

Excerpt 8. Rendition of the conversation opening by IM7

آآ حيت دابا انتما اللي طلبتوا باش تجيو لهنا تهدرو مع الأستادة. و::: قالت ليك واش::: (.) زعما::: رافدين الهم لشي حاجة على (.) ولدكم ولا بنتكم، أشنو شكون عندكم هنا، البنت ولا الولد؟

IM7: *Eee, since it is you who requested to come here to talk with the teacher and::: she says if::: you are worried about something (.) about your son or daughter. Who is it you have here, the girl or the boy?*

ولد، [حنا جينا

Mother: *The boy [we've come*

تجتمعو معاها، واش كاينة شي حاجة شي حاجة اللي محيراكم؟ علاش طلبتو [هاد الإجتماع هادا

IM7: *[inaudible] Is it you who requested to talk to the teacher?*

Excerpt 9. Rendition of the conversation opening by IM8

تجتمعو معاها، واش كاينة شي حاجة شي حاجة اللي محيراكم؟ علاش طلبتو [هاد الإجتماع هادا

IM8: *That is, this time, it is you who have asked::: to meet with her. Is there something that worries you? Why have you asked for this meeting?*

Excerpt 10. Rendition of the conversation opening by IM9

على حساب انتما اللي طلبتو هاد الإجتماع اليوم؟

IM9: *Because, is it you who requested today's meeting?*

أيه

Mother: *Yes.*

.وداكشي علاش بغات تعرف علاش طلبتو هاد الإجتماع بالضبط

IM9: *That's why she wants to know exactly why you asked for this meeting.*

Excerpt 11. Rendition of the conversation opening by IM10

السلام عليكم، انا محمد، مترجم د البلدية، اليوم الهدف ديال هاد (.) هاد (.) هاد لينترڤييستا، هاد المحادثة هو يعرفوا يعني (.) علاش طلبت هاد الأخر (.) باش تهدري مع الأستاذة ((غير مسموع)) (.).

> IM10:   *Hi, I'm Mohamed, the translator from the city council, the objective of this (.) this interview. This interview (.) is for them to know (.) why you asked this (.) to talk to the teacher (inaudible)*

Regarding the teacher's justification, only IM7 renders it in the form of a causal clause ("since …"). IM8 includes the information of the justification, but more implicitly in an assertive sentence, and IM9 does not offer that information as a justification, but as a question.

As for the questions, IM8 transforms the indirect question into two direct questions, IM7 maintains the indirect question, but omits the modal verb and then adds two direct questions that seek to confirm the information she has; this can be viewed as a strategy to seek agreement as in IM1 and IM4. Finally, IM9 also maintains the indirect question, but she changes the modal verb ("she wants to know") and adds an adverb (exactly), changing substantially the intention of the original message, that becomes more imperative.

These changes may affect the interpersonal relationship that unfolds during the interview: the failure to transmit the teachers' politeness strategies or use compensating politeness strategies in the target language could have an impact on the mother's perception of the teacher if the interaction had not been a role-play.

5.2. Conveying bad news

One of the most potentially face-threatening acts during the meeting occurs when the teacher has to tell the mother that her son has failed two subjects. The teacher uses various politeness strategies to mitigate this threat: she previously tells the mother that the son has adapted well to the school, that his grades are good in all the scientific subjects and that all the teachers are proud of him. Then, she says:

Excerpt 12. Conveying bad news (original utterance)

A veure ... ara, eh ... les que té suspeses, són amb quatres, eh?; que són el castellà i el català, bàsicament, són tres i mig – quatre. O sigui que arribarà a aprovar.

Okay ... now, eh ... what he has failed, with a grade of four, right?, these are Spanish and Catalan, which basically he has grades of three and a half – four. Therefore, he will eventually pass.

The pass grade in the Catalonia school system is a minimum of five in a scale of ten. The teacher seems to try to mitigate the bad news (and thus, the potentially FTA) by using hedges (*Okay ... now, eh ...*) and discourse markers to seek agreement, and by stressing that despite not reaching five, the grades are not extremely low; this idea is implicit when she says that "he has failed, *with a grade of four, right?*", and she even connects this idea with its effect ("he will eventually pass") introduced by a connector showing effect (*o sigui*, "therefore"). The following politeness strategies are observed in the Chinese–Catalan IMs' renditions:

– Two of the IMs explicitly mention that a four is "not too bad, not bad" (IM1), "not really very low" (IM3). IM3 also refers to the grading scale in the host country, as IM5 also does. This information may be relevant for the mother, because the grading scale in China is different.

– Two of the IMs explicitly mention that the teacher *believes* the student will be able to pass the course (IM1, IM5).

– IM1 stresses that "the teacher, the tutor" is the author of the last part of the message, which may also be regarded as a face-saving strategy (as also noted by Pöllabauer, 2004). On the one hand, she implicitly puts emphasis on the teacher's authority. On the other hand, if the student eventually failed, she would not have been the source of deceiving expectations.

IM4 is closest in rendering the explicit meaning of the original utterance without making significant omissions or additions.

Excerpt 13. Conveying bad news (IM4's rendition)

她说 Catalan，就是加泰罗尼亚语和西班牙语嘛三四分，也许会及格嘛。

She says that Catalan, that is, Catalan and Spanish, he has three or four. Perhaps he will be able to pass.

However, the implicit meaning of the sentence "*són amb quatres, eh?*" (with a grade of four, right?) – followed by an attenuating discourse marker – was crucial to understanding the message in its correct context and subsequent comment that the student would eventually pass. Furthermore, IM4 adds "perhaps" in the last sentence, thus reducing the level of certainty of the original message and, as a consequence, producing a potentially major cause of anxiety for the mother. This could also result in a potential FTA on the part of the interpreter towards the teacher if the mother, in a real situation, had felt her face threatened.

As for the renditions by the IMs of the Arabic sample, no specific politeness strategies are identified. Four of them use reported speech to emphasise that the teacher is the author of the message, but none of them adds any contextual information to help the mother understand the grading system in Catalonia, even though in Morocco, grades are on a scale of 20 and the minimum to pass is 10. Contrastingly, IM8 transforms the positivity of the original utterance into a rather negative message by putting emphasis on the "not good" (see excerpt 14).

Excerpt 14. Conveying bad news (IM8's rendition)

قالت ليك يعني (.) ف المادات اللي ما جايب ش فيهم النقاط مزيان هي ف::: السبليونية وف الكتلانية، كيجيب تلاتة ونص أربعة. قالت ليك غادي ينجح ولكن ما يجيب شي نقاط مزيانين.

She has said, that is (.) the subjects in which his grades are not good are::: Spanish and Catalan. His grades are three and half – four. She's said that he will pass, but his grades won't be good.

IM3's and IM5's examples reflect that what may be easily transmitted implicitly in one language (e.g. the case of a four grade not being too bad), may require more explicit information for the final recipient to fully understand what was implied in the original. The addition of cultural information to help interlocutors better understand the meaning of messages has been described in previous research in PSI and, for instance, Merlini and Favaron (2003) regard these additions as "power management" strategies, because the interpreter provides the user with useful information for the meeting and even for the life in the new country. For Raga Gimeno (2014), these additions are examples of "cultural contextualisation", which is used to ascertain the correct comprehension of the message. These additions may also be explained from the perspective of pragmatics:

they seek to put the recipient of the message in the same pragmatic context of the original. In tune with this, these additions can also be considered to function as a politeness strategy, because if the implicit information is known, the FTA is reduced.

5.3. Discouraging the interlocutor

Another potential FTA occurs when the teacher suggests that the boy should not continue with high school – which seems to be the preferred option by both the mother and the student – but rather with vocational training (see excerpt 15).

Excerpt 15. Discouraging the interlocutor (original utterance)

A veure, nosaltres creiem que, per fer batxillerat ... està una mica just, especialment en el tema de la llengua. Perquè a batxillerat hi ha molt d'examen escrit i, encara que l'hi fessin oral, ell ha de tenir competència en castellà i català suficient i no la té per fer batxillerat.

Right, we think that, to go to high school ... he will fall a bit short, especially in language aspects. Because at high school there are a lot of written exams and even if they did oral exams to him, he must have enough competency in Spanish and Catalan, and he doesn't have it to go to high school.

The teacher knew that the student wanted to go to high school, which is the reason why she carefully uses what Brown and Levinson (1987: 147) call a weakener hedge ("*una mica*", a bit), and adds a justification and a hypothetical situation ("even if …").

IM5 is the one who seems to be more concerned about the potential threat of this message (see excerpt 16).

Excerpt 16. Discouraging the interlocutor (IM5's rendition)

班主任的意思就是说可能看现在小孩子的情况吧，因为西班牙语跟加泰罗尼亚语两个都还没过技能，就是因为刚到那个水平比较低一点，就是说她现在觉得上高中有一点[不]顺利这样子，有一点困难。

The tutor means that maybe, considering the situation of the child now, because he still does not have competency in either Spanish or Catalan, but this is because

he has just arrived and his level is a bit lower, that is, she now thinks that to go to high school this way would [not] be easy, it would be a bit difficult.

First, she signals the author of the message by using reported speech ("the tutor means …"). She adds a weakener hedge (可能, maybe) and a contextualising clause ("considering the situation of the child now") which puts emphasis on the "now", implicitly conveying the hope that the child may change in the future. When talking about the insufficient competency in Spanish and Catalan, she omits the information about written and oral exams, and instead seems to comfort the mother ("but this is because he has just arrived", implicitly meaning that it is all a matter of time). Finally, the repetition of another weakener hedge (一点, a bit) in the last sentence is also a strategy to mitigate the potentially negative reception of the message.

In the case of IM1, the excessive use of maybe (可能), also a weakener hedge, repeated five times in a single turn, also reflects the wish to attenuate the potential threat. The constant pauses during the rendition of the message seem to reflect the difficulties in finding the right words and expressions to convey this potentially uncomfortable message.

Concluding remarks

Most of the renditions presented in the previous section challenge the notion of accuracy as promoted in PSI codes of ethics. There are omissions, additions and distorted meanings. Several factors may explain these translational shifts: from lack of sufficient competency in the languages of the exchange (apparently, there are problems of comprehension of Catalan in some interpreters of the Arabic sample), to omission of specific politeness strategies to mitigate potential FTAs. In certain occasions, though, translational shifts introduce politeness strategies that help convey interpersonal meaning and thus to fully render the message in all its dimensions.

Concerning the first research question of the study (How are politeness strategies in original utterances conveyed in the renditions, if at all?) the analysis suggests that, despite the important value of politeness strategies in terms of interpersonal meaning, interpreters tend to omit original politeness strategies and focus on the informative

meaning of original utterances. Similarly, concerning the second research question (Do interpreters and mediators add politeness strategies that were not present in the original utterances?), interpreters in the sample rarely added or modified politeness strategies, with only few exceptions. This is consistent with previous research (e.g. Mason & Stewart, 2001) in which interpreters also seemed to lack awareness of the importance of politeness strategies in interpreted dialogues.

Concerning the third research question (How is face given or maintained in the renditions?), the study reflects that the representation – and by extension, the face – of the primary participants in the interaction (i.e., the teacher and the mother) depends on how their utterances are interpreted. Failing to interpret a modal verb or hesitations (as in excerpt 3) means changing the way in which the recipient may regard their interlocutor. It is different to view the teacher as someone who cares for one's child, or to view them as someone who just provides objective information about their grades. In this respect, interpreters' omissions of politeness strategies not only do not give or maintain primary participants' face but may result in FTAs towards them.

The study also reflects how politeness theories in general may be useful to understand how interpersonal relations are built and how interpreters contribute (or not) to this building of relationships. In particular, Brown and Levinson's theory places greater emphasis on the linguistic features, which is an interesting approach to adopt if only transcriptions are available. More comprehensive studies would benefit from the incorporation of contributions of other theorists. For example, Spencer-Oatey's theory of rapport management could help reduce the bias towards Western cultures and include elements of the pragmatics of other languages or cultures.

Furthermore, other pragmatic theories could be combined with the politeness theory to provide other approaches to the same object of study. For instance, relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995) would help explain how interpreters create ostensive stimulus based on their own expectations of the recipient's shared knowledge (which could be used to explain interpreters' additions, for example); argumentation theory (Anscombre & Ducrot, 1983) would be useful to study how certain logical connections are made explicit (or not) in the interpreters' renditions.

Concerning the method adopted for the study, the advantage of using role-plays is that interpreters' and mediators' renditions in virtually the same situation (at least, linguistically-speaking) can be compared. Role-plays also entail drawbacks, though. The most obvious is the artificiality of the situations. The role-play was based on an authentic situation and we attempted to recreate it as close to reality as possible, but the interpreters were aware at all times that the exercise was a role-play, as some of them confirmed during the retrospective interviews. The lack of spontaneous interventions by primary participants also limits the study of politeness strategies to the interpreter, who was the only participant that did not follow a script. In this respect, it has not been possible to evaluate the impact of interpreters' changes in the renditions of original utterances. The lack of systematic annotation of non-verbal cues has also limited the analysis to the textual level, thus excluding from the analysis information regarding intonation that could be relevant to understand pragmatic meaning of the renditions. Finally, another limitation has been the need to rely on back translations from Arabic in the case of the Arabic–Catalan sample, due to researcher's lack of competence in this language combination. For this reason, the article is slightly biased towards examples of the Chinese–Catalan sample.

Nevertheless, the study is still a valuable contribution to the application of a pragmatically-oriented approach to analyse PSI in educational settings. On the one hand, studies of interpreted dialogues are scarce in this subfield of PSI. On the other, it includes two languages with great demand of PSI across Western countries (Chinese and Arabic), while also acknowledging the presence of minority languages such as Catalan in this kind of PSI encounters. Further research could usefully include the perspective of intercultural pragmatics and, more specifically, pragmatic descriptions of each of the languages of the encounter, an aspect that went beyond the scope of this contribution.

Recommended reading

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Notes

[1] In contrast, research on sign language interpreting in educational settings has been much more fruitful (cf. Tipton & Furmanek, 2016).

[2] For other insights on interpreting in educational settings see Foulquié Rubio (2015), who adopts a sociological approach based on questionnaires; and Valero-Garcés and Tan (2017), who focus on cultural aspects and suggest activities for the classroom.

[3] This broader project was entitled "Problems and Strategies in public service interpreting in education and social settings: A study of situations of interpreting of Arabic, Chinese and Romanian". It was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and

[4] Note that the degree programmes in question did not include PSI training, as it was not included in Translation and Interpreting degrees in Barcelona until 2009.

[5] See, for instance, Hofstede's studies about power distance across countries. https://geert-hofstede.com.

[6] Non-renditions (Wadensjö, 1998) refer to utterances by the interpreter that do not correspond to any original message. Interpreters may use them to manage conversation, to ask for clarification or repetition, or to mediate in the case of cultural differences.