

Interpreting as mediation of migrants' agency and institutional support. A case analysis



Claudio Baraldi

*Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e culturali, Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia, Largo Sant'Eufemia 19, I-41124
Modena, Italy*

Received 23 November 2016; received in revised form 7 May 2017; accepted 28 November 2017
Available online

Abstract

This paper deals with the social construction of migrants' personal problems of social inclusion in an Italian Migrant Support Centre. This Centre has the function of delivering information and assistance to migrants who need to confirm residence permits, to apply for family reunion permits, to find a job or to gather information about laws and procedures. In this Centre, social workers provide information/assistance to migrants, and intercultural mediators provide language and cultural support during interactions between social workers and migrants. The paper is based on the analysis of 18 interpreter-mediated interactions involving two social workers, a Nigerian mediator, and 18 English-speaking migrants from West Africa. The analysis of interpreter-mediated interactions shows the production and negotiation of migrant's problems, the participants' positioning, and the meaning of language mediation as intercultural mediation. In particular, the analysis shows the importance of the mediator's positioning as active agent in coordinating interpreter-mediated interactions. The mediator provides expansions of social workers' explanations, checks migrants' understanding, supports migrants' construction of problems, and challenges migrants' conflictive utterances to avoid conflict escalation. Mediation can be considered intercultural in that it can define cultural conditions and produce support of migrants' actions, narrowing the gap between migrants' social problems and institutions.

© 2017 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Mediation; Interpreter-mediated interaction; Coordination; Positioning; Social inclusion

1. Introduction

This paper concerns the mediation of migrants' problems of social inclusion in an Italian Migrant Support Centre (MSC). The MSC was set up by the local administration with the aim of providing information and support to migrants who need to confirm residence permits, apply for family reunion permits, look for a job, or gather information about laws and bureaucratic procedures. The MSC was opened following recent migration flows to Italy. Migration has dramatically increased in the last thirty years, with migrants coming from Eastern Europe (above all Romania and Albania), North Africa (above all Morocco and Tunisia), Sub-Saharan Africa (especially Senegal, Nigeria, and Ghana), and Asia (China, the Philippines, India, Bangladesh). The number of migrants exceeds 5 million (about 8% of the Italian population). Most migrants came to Italy looking for a job and a better standard of living. It is interesting to note that the recent increase in the number of asylum seekers, despite being emphasised by the media and some politicians, is relatively low compared with

E-mail address: claudio.baraldi@unimore.it.

the total number of migrants in Italy, with around 200,000 asylum applications in the last two years, as shown by Eurostat statistics.

The MSC analysed in this paper is located in a highly industrialised area of Northern Italy, in which about 14% of all residents are migrants. These visit the MSC mainly for residence, work, and family reunion permits, which are regulated by Law 189/2002 (introduced by the centre-right government in 2002). This law tightened controls on migrants' permits and introduced complicated bureaucratic procedures to obtain them. For this reason, many local administrations set up specialised centres to give information and support to migrants who need to comply with the Italian law and bureaucratic procedures for obtaining permits.

In the MSC analysed, some Italian social workers have the task to collect information about migrants' problems and promote their understanding of laws and procedures. These activities aim to increase the migrants' ability to solve their own problems of social inclusion, which is often hampered by laws and procedures. The social workers collaborate with intercultural mediators, who are frequently employed in Italian public services (see [Belpiede, 2002](#); [Ceccatelli Gurrieri, 2003](#); [Luatti, 2011](#), among others). These mediators are expected to enhance positive intercultural relations between institutions and migrants. They are also expected to provide interpreting, as language is often a considerable communication barrier for migrants ([Baraldi and Gavioli, 2012](#); [Merlini, 2009a](#)). However, despite being employed as interpreters, intercultural mediators have not necessarily been trained in interpreting techniques.

This paper is based on a single mediator's contribution to the interactions taking place at the MSC. In these interactions, the migrants present their problems and receive information and support by a social worker, as well as translation by the mediator. The paper describes the ways in which these mediated interactions revolve around migrants' problems of social inclusion and possible actions to solve these problems. In particular, the analysed interactions deal with the legal and bureaucratic problems in and limitations to obtaining residence, work, and family reunion permits.

2. Analysing agency in mediated interactions

Many studies have analysed the ways in which public service interpreting is achieved in mediated interactions. In particular, interpreter-mediated interactions have been analysed as organised sequences of participants' turns at talk occurring in healthcare services ([Angelelli, 2004](#); [Baraldi, 2012](#); [Bolden, 2000](#); [Davidson, 2000](#); [Gavioli, 2015](#); [Hsieh, 2007](#); [Merlini, 2009b](#)), courts ([Angermeyer, 2009](#); [Hale, 2004](#)), schools ([Davitti, 2013](#)), centres for asylum seekers ([Maryns, 2013](#); [Mason, 2006](#); [Merlini, 2009a](#)), and other settings (e.g., [Böser, 2013](#); [Van de Mierop et al., 2012](#)).

Studies on public service interpreting show that mediation concerns both language and culture ([Pöschhacker, 2008](#)). [Wadensjö \(1998\)](#) argues that interpreters "cannot avoid functioning as intercultural mediators" (p. 75), as interpreting makes it possible to identify non-linguistic features and differences between people, such as differences in world view (p. 277). [Angelelli \(2012\)](#) analyses the ways in which interpreters translate doctors' questions about the level of pain felt by patients, based on a pain scale, adapting the North American questioning style based on a pain scale to the much less precise questioning style of a Latin American culture. [Penn and Watermeyer \(2012\)](#) analyse the ways in which interpreters manage communication between a Zulu aphasic patient and a South African white doctor, adapting the language of Western medicine to the patient's ways of expressing herself. In these studies, interpreting is seen as a way of negotiating cultural and/or linguistic differences in interaction ([Zhu, 2014](#)), and interpreter-mediated interaction as a specific case of intercultural communication, in which cultural and linguistic differences are constructed and negotiated (see [Holliday, 2011](#); [Piller, 2011](#); [Verschuere, 2008](#), among others).

This paper investigates mediated interactions in which migrants' problems of social inclusion are produced and negotiated as problems of language and culture. The analysis focuses on the ways in which mediated interactions (1) highlight migrants' problems, and (2) enhance institutional support for solving them. The analysis shows that the mediator actively contributes to the social construction of migrants' problems and to the enhancement of possible solutions thereof by extending institutional support, showing active listening, and reducing the risk of conflicts. The analysis also stimulates reflection on the meaning of culture and intercultural mediation in these interactions.

As shown in what follows, the social construction of migrants' problems and institutional support in mediated interaction is influenced by the participants' *positioning* ([Mason, 2009](#)). Positioning is defined as a discursive construction that makes a participant's actions intelligible in the interaction ([Van Langenhove and Harré, 1999](#)). According to [Mason \(2009\)](#), it is important to analyse the "conversational moves" and discursive practices that display the interpreter's contingent positioning, rather than the interpreter's role as a fixed stance. Positioning is "sensitive to the subtleties and nuances of moment-by-moment interaction" ([Winslade and Monk, 2008:98](#)). Positioning is both mutual, in that participants' actions position themselves (self-positioning) and their interlocutors (other-positioning), and reflexive, in that each participant's positioning is based on other participants' positioning.

It is however undeniable that positioning is also the expression of institutional roles, for example, within the MSC, the roles of social worker, migrant client, and mediator. Therefore, rather than abandoning the concept of role, some analysts

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7297562>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7297562>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)