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Training Interpreters as Cross-cultural Mediators: New Way of Teaching ESP or of Solving International Problems

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Abstract: In modern globalized society the emphasis of interpreter's professional activity is changing. It is of interest to develop the future interpreter's ability to establish correspondences and connections between linguistic signs and cross-cultural codes, taking into account the historical and cultural background of interacting countries (in synchrony and diachrony) from the point of view of multiple historical traditions besides the simultaneous interpretation of meaning. This article aims to contribute to the growing field of conflict resolution by exploring issues facing mediators-interpreters in cross-cultural conflicts, by analyzing factors that should be considered by mediators-interpreters and by specifying strategies for conducting successful mediation.

1. Introduction

Conflict is a naturally occurring process and a part of the human experience regardless of one's culture. The grounds for the conflict are different as well as their possible solutions. We live nowadays in the modern globalized world and conflicts here require new and innovative solutions. As the 21st century gets into stride so does the call for a discipline combining culture and translation (linguistic and cultural mediation). An interpreter conveys not only information, but also elements of culture [1]. This article aims to consider the ways interpreters can become professional mediators in the field of international business, politics, economics and development. We will firstly analyze the cultural difference (mentioning different culture-codes: long-term vs. short-term orientation, stereotypes, different Uncertainty Avoidance Index, etc.), specify strategies for successful training and conducting interpretation-mediation (comparison of intercultural norms of professional communication based on value orientations, analysis of a key informant and emotional sensitivity, etc.).

2. Mediation and cultural differences

When we use the language it is not just to communicate the meaning, but it is rather to facilitate the understanding between the interlocutors. Mediation is a structured, interactive process where an impartial third party assists disputing parties in resolving conflict through the use of specialized communication and negotiation techniques [2]. Such type of a conflict resolution has many benefits

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that is why nowadays it is getting so popular. The main benefits are: both parties are given an opportunity to put forward their point of view, conflict resolution is addressed by a «neutral» and professional third party, it is a win-win model of negotiations in any field that can help to escape a serious conflict or misunderstanding.

There are huge differences between cultures and countries that are not obvious for the parties. Mediator's work here is to observe these differences and to maintain an efficient dialogue or negotiation. In this article we will mention only the most significant phenomena that can affect the quality of cross-cultural communication.

Low- VS High-context cultures. The differentiation between high and low context cultures is meant to highlight differences in verbal (words themselves) and nonverbal communication (underlying context, hidden meaning).

Hofstede's Power Distance Index. PDI measures inequality of people having different social or professional statuses and the way such people communicate with each other [3].

Individualism VS Collectivism. At this stage the orientation of the goals must be observed (whether these are individual or collective/team/company goals) [3].

Long-term orientation VS Short-term orientation. People of long-term oriented countries are focused on the future, willing to delay short-term material or social success or even short-term emotional gratification in order to prepare for the future. Short-term oriented people are focused more on the present or recent past.

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI). It indicates the extent to which a culture's members feel comfortable in unstructured situations [3].

Stereotypes have to be considered as well.

In this way, a mediator is a person who facilitates communication between the parties (considering all cultural differences mentioned) and helps the mediation participants reach a mutually satisfactory solution.

3. Training interpreters as cross-cultural mediators or a new way of teaching ESP

Learning a foreign language is more than just grammar or vocabulary. It is not enough to read or listen in order to understand. Nor is it enough to speak or write to get our message across. Even when we have mastered all these skills, misunderstanding can happen. In order to avoid miscommunication, we need to mediate. Mediation as a tool of learning foreign languages was introduced just recently. According to CEFR (2016), mediation integrates the other language activities, it combines reception (reading and listening skills), production (speaking and writing) and interaction (engaging in conversation).

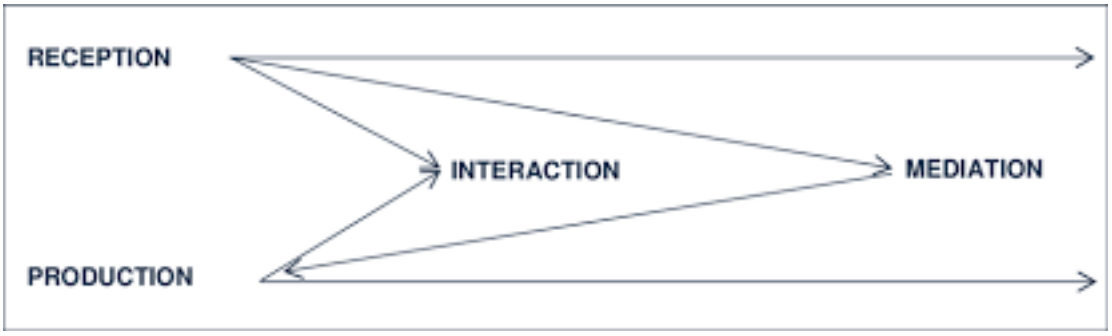

Figure 1. CEFR mediation description

Finally, mediation is seen as adjusting the message to the recipient. As we can see, mediation in this case is considered as a linguistic process of working with words and different languages, that

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makes communication possible between persons who are unable to communicate with each other directly and understand each other normally. A good mediator should be able to work with language itself but at the same be able to recognize all cultural differences and make them subtler (any interpreter or translator is already a linguistic mediator). Mediation is taught by using exercises on translation, interpretation, paraphrasing in both written and spoken ways or by asking students to prepare a presentation on the basis of research/article/class survey or by negotiating a solution, giving directions/instructions, discussing cultural differences. On the further steps students can take part in a negotiation with the help of translator-mediator model, changing their roles.

4. Stages of interpretation-mediation

The first step of a successful cross-cultural mediation for an interpreter is to specify the mediational model. The mediational model specifies who directly communicates with the interpreter-mediator. Next step is to analyze the cultural and professional background (all cultural peculiarities and differences must be observed) and assess the possible conflict. After analysis starts interpretation without any significant changes. Here the interpreter has to preserve the original meaning and the way it was said (minor censorship is possible). After interpretation, the third party (interpreter-mediator) has to give a descriptive explanation on what was said (commenting) that helps to transfer the original meaning if it is lost during the translation or because of cultural differences [4].

5. Conclusion

An interpreter, as a mediator between cultures, is no longer indispensable in an entrepreneurial environment. It is an integral part of negotiations, meetings and business trips. Many international businesses hire their own interpreters and translators that are now responsible not only for translating what is said, but also acting as a cultural mediator who can provide independent expert advice.

In this article, we briefly reviewed the mediation process itself. We examined the main cultural differences that need to be considered when working as a mediator-translator. Mediation was also considered in terms of language learning and there were some exercises given as an example.

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