

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Evaluating the Efficacy of Relay Interpreters: A Case Study about Interpreting for a Development-Aid Project in Sierra Leone

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Abstract:

The importance of communication to a successful humanitarian-development-peace process is self-evident. Yet, the role of interpreters in those settings is often neglected despite the fact that effective communication has gained more and more attention from both governmental and non-governmental organisations. This is all the truer for the role of relay interpreters, who are peculiar to the investigated field. This paper reviews the aforementioned shift of the role of interpreters from being invisible to a little more visible before focusing on the current status of interpreters, specifically relay interpreters, working in protracted humanitarian contexts. To further establish the research niche of interpreters in development-aid contexts, Bourdieu's field theory is adopted to conceptualise what constitutes the field and habitus of their activity (1990). This paper aims to shed light on the importance of relay interpreters in particular and discuss the efficacy of their work. To do this, a case study of a China-aid project in Sierra Leone is evaluated and qualitative data are gathered by interviewing eight interpreters working in protracted humanitarian contexts and analysing results utilising Tomaševski's 4-A approach (2001) adapted to interpreting. With a focus on relay interpreting, this paper is an empirical investigation that coincides with Bourdieu's opinion of the ideal way to objectify Translation Studies (TS) using a sociological viewpoint.

Keywords: Development aid, field theory, relay interpreting, humanitarian interpreter

1. Introduction

Language mediation is fundamental in enabling communication. In conflict zones and post-conflict zones, this is even more so. The indispensability of effective communication to a fruitful international humanitarian project is acknowledged by both intergovernmental organisations like the United Nations (cf. General Assembly Resolution 46-182) and non-governmental organisations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (cf. Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations in Disaster Relief).



Such ‘official’ recognition has given rise to research focusing on interpreters and linguistic mediation in humanitarian contexts. For example, studies have been conducted on interpreters at the intersection of interpreting and humanitarianism (Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche, 2019), as well as translators in disaster settings (Federici and Cadwell, 2018; O’Mathúna et al., 2020) and interpreters in conflict zones (Tesseur and Footitt, 2019; Ghassemi and Muman, 2019).

As a result, many expressions conceptualising the role of interpreters in humanitarian contexts emerged, such as ‘citizen translators’ (Federici and Cadwell, 2018), ‘local interpreters’ (Rosendo, 2016) and ‘war interpreters’ (Allen, 2012). By ‘war interpreters’, Allen (2012) encompasses three sub-categories of interpreters: ‘military linguists’, ‘contract interpreters’, and ‘humanitarian interpreters’. However, the boundaries between these definitions are not always clear, and more often than not, humanitarian interpreters are also contract interpreters (as in this case study).

In this context, an established distinction between humanitarian aid and development aid (Tomaševski, 1993) came into being. However, the expression ‘humanitarian interpreters’ has today become an umbrella term conceptualising all linguistic mediators working in difficult contexts. For example, Barakat and Milton emphasise the unity of the ‘humanitarian-development-peace process’ (2020), cancelling, *de facto*, the distinction between the two concepts, especially in other fields of research. Furthermore, Moser-Mercer et al. view development aid as part of the protracted humanitarian contexts in which a ‘humanitarian-development nexus’ is situated (2021). In line with such developments, this paper will use the expression ‘humanitarian interpreters’ (HI) to refer to the personnel officially recognised by both international and local actors in enabling cross-language communication.

The research goal of this paper is to assess the efficacy of relay interpreters in humanitarian-aid contexts. To do so, this study first reviews the invisibility and visibility of interpreters in history (Section 2.1), and then adopts Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘habitus and field’ to produce a tentative definition of HI (Section 2.2), in line with TS research (Tipton, 2008; Baker, 2010; Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche, 2019). Section 2.3 considers relay interpreting as the most used interpreting method in humanitarian contexts, while Section 3 introduces a case study: a China-aid humanitarian operation in Sierra Leone mediated by relay interpreters (from Krio and local dialects into English, and from English into Chinese and the other way round). Finally, the 4-A approach (Tomaševski, 2001) is experimentally adapted and adopted in Section 4 to analyse the data gathered by interviews with interpreters, benefactors and beneficiaries of the illustrated humanitarian operation. The conclusion (Section 5) summarises a tentative assessment of the efficacy of relay interpreters in the context of the aforementioned case study.

2. Literature Review

The first documented cross-cultural language mediation can be traced back to 2600 BC, when the job of ‘interpreters’ was recorded in a clay tablet among some other professions (Chrobak, 2013). Yet, despite the undeniable importance of their role, interpreters went mostly invisible in historical data in the history of human civilisation (Roland, 1999; Delisle and Woodsworth, 2012). The situation changed, however, as TS underwent a ‘cultural turn’ in the last century (Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999) with many researchers adopting a sociological approach to interpreting. As a result, the importance of communication in multilingual contexts has been studied more frequently (Seeger, 2006; Dragovic-



Drouet, 2007; Takeda, 2009; Baker, C, 2010; Baker, M, 2010; Hunt et al., 2019), and TS have focused more and more on the role of interpreters (Blommaert, 2001; Pöllabauer, 2004; Palmer, 2007; Juvinal, 2013).

This section will investigate such a shift before further reviewing the literature on interpreters working in humanitarian contexts (Section 2.1). Then, Bourdieu's field theory will be introduced as a feasible theoretical framework to conceptualise HI (Section 2.2). Lastly, relay interpreting as a ubiquitous strategy adopted in humanitarian interpreting will also be discussed (Section 2.3).

2.1 The invisibility and visibility of interpreters

Communication between populations speaking different languages can be found throughout history, as is the need for linguistic mediation. Studies on ancient Egypt confirm the presence of interpreters, to, among other things, maintain peaceful contact with the foreigners (Galan, 1995, cited in Rosendo, 2016). However, it is worth noting that the social status of interpreters in ancient Egypt was low despite their value (Kurz, 1985), as many were lower-class, slaves, or freed men (Roland, 1999).

Interpreters working in conflict settings were better known during the Crusades (Runciman, 1951-1954), when crusaders of different nationalities were brought together to join international expeditions 'authorised by the pope on Christ's behalf' to prevent Jerusalem from being attained by the Saracen (Riley-Smith, 2009). In this context, interpreters attempted to mediate between 'many Western languages, including English, Gaelic, German, Slavonic, Italian, Spanish and French' (Bischoff, 1961, cited in Rosendo, 2016), though most crusaders spoke French as a *lingua franca* (Roland, 1999).

In the modern era, translation activities, under 'the influence of globalisation of exchanges', are braided deeply into economic, political, diplomatic, and cultural exchanges (Brisset, 2017). In these contexts, quality varies a lot because 'a lack of definition and clear roles has characterised the interpreter's working environment throughout history' (Rosendo 2016). This has led, in history, to the interpreter's invisibility. According to Delisle and Woodsworth (2012) and Roland (1999, cited in Rosendo, 2016), there are three main reasons that traditionally account for this:

- (a) Written word is considered to be more important, and thus more likely to be manifested in historical data.
- (b) Interpreters are often from the lower-class, and thus of low social statuses like slaves, freedmen, and war prisoners.
- (c) Limitations of paper records determined that the limited space for recording can be only dedicated to primary information.

The situation has changed in recent years when scholars in TS started to draw on new perspectives, among which lies Bourdieu's field theory aiming to study translation from a sociological standpoint. Such a shift marks a great change in TS, which traditionally focused on target text output. Cronin (2003) regards this shift as an advancement in the comprehensive view of translation as a political, cultural, and social activity. Bourdieu's theory provides the culturalist and globalist research paradigms with a powerful tool to veer the TS away from the descriptive and poly-system methodology (Hermans, 1999) towards 'more sociologically- and anthropologically-informed approaches to study translation processes and products' (Inghilleri, 2005).



Bourdieu's theory has been proven insightful in empowering translators and interpreters, having their production and reproduction of textual properties examined within the boundaries of social and cultural activities. Moreover, this theory has enabled disentangling the complex dynamics between agency and structure, thus providing insight into how to unveil the 'missing link' (Roland, 1999) behind other social and/or cultural activities. Arguably, it is this new perspective of zooming-out on translation products, including agents and the structure, that has facilitated the 'cultural turn' that TS underwent at the end of the last century (Bassnett and Trivedi, 1999). Since then, more attention within the discipline was given to translators and interpreters themselves (Blommaert, 2001; Pöllabauer, 2004; Palmer, 2007; Juvinal, 2013), and, hence, marks a milestone on the visibility of translators and interpreters.

2.2 Conceptualising humanitarian interpreters with Bourdieu's theory

Since TS took a cultural turn and more scholarly attention centred on translators and interpreters, the field has witnessed an increasing interest in interpreters working in various environments, like conflict or post-conflict settings or disaster settings, where access to information is of paramount importance (Altay and Labonte, 2014; O'Brien et al., 2018). More often than not, in these settings, more than one language is involved (Federici et al., 2019), though only one is used as the mainstream communication tool, with which all the vital information is delivered, thus marginalising the other languages involved (Cadwell and O'Brien, 2016). Such a problem of marginalised language access is widely scrutinised in TS. Taibi and Ozolins (2016) provided a comprehensive overview of the marginalised language access phenomenon. O'Brien (2018) adopted the 4-A rights-based analytical tool to deal with the problems of language access in the context of governmental actions and perplexing work environments. As such, translation and interpreting can be seen as a necessity to guarantee equal rights of access to information in those settings, a civil right that is enshrined in the United Nation's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which stipulates, in Article 26, that language should not be a ground for discrimination.

To address language access, terminological discrepancies have populated the discussion of translation and interpreting activities in various environments. According to Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche (2019), perplexed environments can be mainly divided into asylum procedures, conflict zones, and humanitarian organisations. As the taxonomy of translators and interpreters working in perplexed environments advances, many conceptualisations defining those interpreters also emerge: 'citizen translators' (Federici and Cadwell, 2018), 'local interpreters' (Rosendo, 2016) and 'war interpreters' (Allen, 2012), the latter being further subcategorised into 'military linguists', 'contract interpreters', and 'humanitarian interpreters'. Because interpreters working in humanitarian contexts usually possess dual identities – HI and contract interpreters – these definitions sometimes overlap, hence the need for a more systematic conceptualisation of HI.

To do so, an inclusive and comprehensive theoretical framework is required. One attempt to conceptualise HI is made by Tipton (2008), who draws on Bourdieu's field theory to define HI. In the field of TS, Bourdieu's work provides a perspective with which the active participation of social and cultural agents in 'the production and reproduction of textual and discursive practices' (Inghilleri, 2005) is considered. Although Bourdieu's methodology is still largely in line with the traditional sociological philosophy, it challenges the conventional polarisation between subject and object as well as the 'division between the individual and the external world' (ibid). Moreover, it provides the 'theorisation



of interaction between agency and structure'. This epistemological framework fits with the research purpose of this paper in investigating the dynamics between the 'field' of humanitarianism and the interpreters' category as a whole, leading to an evaluation of the efficacy of interpreters.

To Bourdieu, the ideal way to objectify translation is an empirical investigation of the relevant social practices. This should include 'the recognition of the social determinations that motivate the research', namely 'the presuppositions inherent in researchers' scientific stance' and 'the social and biological trajectories of the translators or interpreters' (ibid). As a result, sociology studies should endeavour to include the comprehension of human conditions as 'constituted in social practices, not in individual actions, decision-making processes nor expressions' (ibid). These social practices, or actions by social agents, are not 'the mere carrying out of a rule', but the result of the habitus of an agent formed by their position in the field (Guo, 2016). To fathom the conditions of the HI is, then, of paramount importance to understand and analyse an agent's habitus and actions as they provide an insight into the field in which the agents exist and respond.

From the perspective of 'habitus', or 'the social and biological trajectories of the translators or interpreters' (Inghilleri, 2003), the two factors that are most frequently considered within the pertinent academic field are HI's educational and cultural backgrounds (Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche, 2019). This case study at its core presents a great opportunity to closely examine how these two factors influence the interpreters' decision-making, namely, the relay strategy that involves interpreters of two very different educational (trained and untrained) and cultural ('cultural insider' and cultural 'outsider') backgrounds. Considering the very different habitus between Chinese-to-English interpreters and English to the local language interpreters, the logic of how their habitus influences their decision makings must be rather dissimilar on the outside and yet should produce very similar results on the inside. This results in an answer to Simeoni's question (2005, cited in Inghilleri, 2005): where do sociologically-located researchers should stand in relation to translation practices?

In terms of the 'field' in which HI socially stands and their output delivers, one of the main features that differentiate HI from common interpreters is that most humanitarian organisations manifest many features of 'total institutions' (Goffman, 2007, cited in Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche, 2019). That is, the interpreters working for those total institutions are separated from the wider society as they live in the designated accommodation, interact with authorised personnel only and act strictly according to the rules and regulations of the organisations. The reason for such high security is not hard to fathom: the sensitivity of political implications, the occasional confidentiality of some tasks, and most importantly, the volatile physical environment they operate in. Besides, HI's decision-making is very often influenced, if not stipulated, by the field, as 'their relationship with the officer might influence whether the interpreter is able to remain in employment' (Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche, 2019).

As such, the two distinct features of the perplexity of HI's work are: the heterogeneous 'habitus' of the HI group and the distinctive 'field' compared to general conference interpreters. That is to say, through Bourdieu's field theory, the conceptualisation of HI is conducted towards the fathoming of HI's decision-making so as to investigate its potential influence on both the benefactor and the beneficiaries.



2.3 Relay interpreting

Another interesting phenomenon concerning humanitarian interpreting activities, as pointed out by World Disaster Report 2018, is that only a narrow selection of languages are used as the lingua franca in a large number of humanitarian contexts (IFRCRCS, 2018). Two main possible reasons accounting for this phenomenon are: (a) the lack of linguists in the beneficiaries' local language, despite many beneficiaries in those projects can perform basic communication in English, as one of the interviewees in the benefactor group commented; and (b) the linguistic diversity of the affected population (IFRCRCS, 2018) that makes it impossible to concentrate on other languages than English. Therefore, the humanitarian interpreter groups of China-aid projects often consist of both contract linguists (working between the language of the benefactors and English) and local interpreters (working between English and the languages of the beneficiaries). As such, evaluation of the efficacy of relay interpreting is of high importance for possible improvements and for how future humanitarian operations could enhance communication between parties incorporating interpreters.

In such contexts mediated by relay interpreters, quality is one of the major communication problems. The true factor that undermines the quality of interpreting service in humanitarian projects is well expressed in the 2018 World Disasters Report. The report stresses that, due to the linguistic diversity of many disaster-affected populations, many humanitarian projects adopt widely spoken languages like English as a lingua franca to enable communication and call on untrained individuals who speak both English and the language of the beneficiaries to communicate with professional interpreters hired by the benefactors who do not speak the lingua franca. It is a strategy often used when no professional interpreters can be employed in a specific language combination (Mikkelson, 1999). The untrained nature of the former undermines the quality of the final product.

The relay interpreting strategy adopted in humanitarian contexts is different from the one used in conference interpreting (Jones, 2014), mainly in three ways. Firstly, it is more used in liaison interpreting than in simultaneous interpreting, so the interpreting process would normally take longer than in conference interpreting. Secondly, as it is in the form of liaison interpreting, there is more chance for interpreters to double-check concepts to ensure effective delivery of important messages. Thirdly, it is often combined with much more multimodality (e.g., body language, visual interplay, or physical demonstrations of some specific tasks) than conference interpreting.

Adopting liaison relay interpreting instead of simultaneous relay interpreting depends on several reasons. First of all, there is an obvious lack of professional equipment and venues, as many humanitarian projects take place in rough settings. Secondly, according to the comments from one interviewee, the budget of most humanitarian projects is often too tight to allow any consideration for highly professional interpreting services, nor is there a need for it in most scenarios. Also, in many foreign humanitarian projects (except for those in disaster settings) time constraints are often not a factor and the accuracy of the information takes primacy, as confirmed by one of the interviewees that we will deal with later in the paper.

In the next section, we will try to understand how this scenario, differently from conference interpreting, affects quality by providing data and a subsequent analysis of these data.



3. The Case Study

3.1 Overview

The Sierra Leone Civil War began on March 23rd, 1991, when the Revolutionary United Front tried to overthrow Joseph Momoh's government and ended on January the 18th, 2002, when the Revolutionary United Front was defeated, and President Kabbah declared that the civil war was over (Neethling, 2007). In 2018, Julius Naada Bio was elected as the president of Sierra Leone in the general election, which marked the formation of a stable political regime for the reconstruction and development of Sierra Leone.

On November 1st, 2018, a team of nine people received a briefing and some basic training before being hired by the Chinese project called "2018 Sierra Leone porcelain-making overseas training class". The project was organised by the Department of Commerce of Hunan Province, under the auspices of the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China. The team consisted of one supervisor, three interpreters (with one interpreter from within the government as the team leader and two other interpreters, including the first author of this paper) and five porcelain-making teachers. The project lasted 45 days, from November to December 2018. The main aim was to provide porcelain-making training classes to those who live on the outskirts of Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, and struggle to make a living after the civil war. The training classes recruited 120 individuals and trained them in basic porcelain-producing skills. The aim was to teach them a profession that could guarantee their financial independence and avoid 'the hazards of project-cycle programming that implode as external funding drains' (Moser-Mercer et al., 2021). Out of the 120 trainees, around 10 of them spoke fluent English and 21 understood English to a satisfactory level, while the rest could only understand basic English. Thus, one of the trainees was designated as the relay interpreter from English into Krio, and occasionally other local languages.

At the end of the programme, five outstanding trainees were selected to go to China to learn more advanced porcelain-making skills for a year before returning to Sierra Leone and teach others how to earn a living through porcelain-making. Among those five people, three trainees spoke adequate English to understand the Chinese-to-English interpreters without the help of the local interpreter; while two others managed to earn their skills solely depending on the relay interpreter. Noteworthy is the gender of the selected five and how things evolved after the training in Sierra Leone: the three trainees understanding English were men, while the two not understanding English were women. The latter never went to China and they were replaced by two male trainees by the village, allegedly because of their language abilities. However, the local interpreter was one of the three male trainees initially selected, which suggests that this was just an excuse.

3.2 Data collection

In this case study, five people from the Chinese delegation were selected to be interviewed, including the programme leader, two porcelain-making teachers (not knowing English), the interpreter supervisor, and another interpreter (having a C1 knowledge of English). Of the Sierra Leonean delegation, three were selected, including the relay interpreter (who also acted as a trainee) and two other trainees, the three of them having a B2 knowledge of English.



The interview was conducted online. Thus, to ensure the reliability and rigour of the qualitative interviews, several strategies were adopted. Firstly, interviewees were strongly recommended to be interviewed with a reliable Internet connection (Chiumento, et al., 2018). Secondly, Adobe Connect was chosen over Skype to construct a more research-like environment (James and Busher, 2009). Thirdly, the interviewees were guaranteed to stay anonymous so that they may speak freely about the project (Chiumento, et al., 2018). Before the start of the interview, the five interviewees who spoke English (B, C, F, G, and H) took a short assessment of their English abilities under the guidance of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment* (2001). In all, 8 participants took part in targeted, semi-structured, one-to-one interviews (see appendix). Due to a lack of representativeness of the interviewees, the goal of the data gathering is to get diverse perspectives analysed qualitatively (Stake, 1995).

4. Analysis and Discussion

The 4-A rights-based analytic tool standardised by Tomaševski (2001) was used to evaluate the results. The 4-A rights-based method was designed to assess governmental human rights obligations in education by examining the symmetry of the right to education and governmental obligations across four dimensions: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. This 4-A approach recognises education as a basic and yet important right and evaluates it in a structured and comprehensive way. O'Brien et al. (2018) adapted this framework to translation in disaster settings. Based on this, we will analyse the data based on the following 4 As:

- Availability — whether the interpreting is made available to all beneficiaries, both the English interpretation and its relay interpretation in the local language(s).
- Accessibility — when available, is information equally accessible to all beneficiaries, regardless of their linguistic proficiency in English?
- Acceptability — is the interpretation, both the Chinese-English one and the relay one, of high quality?
- Adaptability — is interpretation adapted to various needs like the size of the audience (120 people), the uneven linguistic proficiency of participants and the lack of professional interpreting equipment?

With this framework, the following sections will decode the data gathered from interviews in those four dimensions in pairs, before providing some insights on how to better enable communication in humanitarian projects.

4.1 Availability and accessibility

The programme supervisor, who happens to be interviewee A, mentions that empirically speaking, it is often needed to invite at least one of the project beneficiaries to join the interpreting team:

(...) judging from the previous projects, the trainees of our projects are culturally and economically disadvantaged, that is to say, although the official language of their countries is English, many of them do not speak English, so we had to find a local interpreter as to find a Chinese to local language interpreter is almost impossible. So,



this is the best solution because we did more and more projects in recent years that we gradually found this problem and added it to the briefing (our translation from Chinese).

This suggests an evolving awareness of the linguistic needs of the beneficiaries. Despite such official recognition of linguistic needs, basic data on the language proficiency and literacy levels of the beneficiaries is absent, which means the issue cannot be systematically conceptualised, and that feasible and detailed guidance on how to address it cannot be provided. As such, the responsibility of handling it mainly falls upon the interpreting team, mandated to solve any communicative problems. In this case, they are called to decide whether a relay interpreter is needed and this interpreter should be based on data about the language skills of the trainees collected on the first day of the meeting. Hiring a local relay interpreter is a double-edged sword: on the one side, it is a positive strategy as the potential linguistic resources of participants are used to enhance communication. On the other side, it brings to what O'Brien et al. (2018) call 'absolving authorities from their responsibilities'. Related to this, interviewee G (a trainee) pointed out the asymmetry between the needs of the trainees who do not speak enough English and their limited access to information:

many of us do not talk good English but we can't talk to Bangura (the local interpreter). He is busy, so we talk to you or Susan (one of the interpreters). I'm ok. I can understand you but many other people can't.

The problem of having a large audience is widely acknowledged among interviewees, as interviewee F (the local relay interpreter and trainee) also pointed out that:

we have 120 people but a lot of us do not speak English, so I have to talk to many people. But I can't be everywhere, not all the time. But it's not too bad because they can understand a little when you and Susan speak English because you can show them how to do it with your hands.

This coincides with the observation by the same interviewee:

one advantage of this training project is that it's very practice-based so physical demonstration from the interpreters proves to be very useful in enabling communication between Chinese-English interpreters and the trainees when the relay interpreter is absent.

In the feedback questionnaires provided by the trainees, the overall satisfaction with the interpreting team was rated 4.1 out of 5 on average, as mentioned by interviewee A (the project manager). Based on the success of the project, both interviewees D and E (the trainers) agreed that the interpreting team did a good job, as per D:

This task, cannot be done without you interpreters, honestly, I know how hard this task is, especially a lot of terms we used, even for Chinese, [they] may not understand those terms, but you have to interpret them to the beneficiaries and a lot of them even do not speak English (our translation from Chinese).

Apart from the appreciation of the interpreting team's work, interviewee E also expressed some concerns about the accessibility:



(...) but there is one thing that I think is not good, it is that we have five teachers while only three interpreters, sometimes I want to communicate with the trainees but I have to wait for you to finish other stuff (our translation from Chinese).

This concern coincides with interviewee C's (one of the interpreters) observation:

Our interpreting team was short of hands, there were several times when I had two teachers by my side and they both want to say something, but you guys are busy elsewhere, so I had to ask one teacher to wait a bit, which is surely very rude'.

This uneven interpreter-speaker-audience ratio is recognised by both speakers and interpreters. However, this is acknowledged differently by interpreters despite their habitus. The relay interpreter recognises the problem from the audience's perspective. The Chinese interpreters, on the contrary, tend to prioritise the speaker's needs. Also, the relay interpreter regrets not having proper training in interpreting and feels he could have done better sometimes. This clearly evidences his apprehension about jeopardising the quality of the interpreting service. Furthermore, their pre-determined connection with the beneficiary group makes them free from the limitations imposed by the 'total institution' while prioritising the interests of the beneficiaries.

4.2 Acceptability and adaptability

This discussion about acceptability does not aim to support any claim on the absolute quality of the interpretation but to evaluate the performance of the interpreting team from the perspective of the target audience. However, the deciding factors that influence the absolute quality and the acceptability of interpretations are largely the same. An often-examined factor in research is whether the interpreter received any professional and systematic training (Guo, 2016; Federici and Cadwell, 2018; Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche, 2019). In this project, all three Chinese-English interpreters are professionally trained interpreters, while the relay interpreter was never professionally trained. When being asked whether he had received any professional training, interviewee F added he had already been chosen five or six times as a relay interpreter in humanitarian projects. Therefore, even though he did not receive any professional training, he had enough experience as an interpreter with this specific audience. However, information from the other trainees implied that professional training might still be indispensable. To this extent, interviewee G (a trainee) pointed out that the information delivered by the Chinese interpreters was often intact and logical while they sometimes failed to make sense of the local language interpretation. This is confirmed by the local interpreter himself, in that he admits he would slightly correct his previous interpretation or add some omitted information. Equally, opinions from interviewee H (another trainee) also supported the claim that the interpretation in the local language was sometimes self-contradictory and the interpreter had to often double-check and correct himself.

In general, the overall acceptability of the interpretation provided throughout the project is high, as the questions on interpretation quality scored 3.7 out of 5 on average, the most recurrent comments being 'easy to understand' and 'need more people'. One of the respondents was worried about how well the feedback questionnaires could reflect the true thoughts of the beneficiaries. In the words of interviewee A:



Sometimes we would also doubt about how accurate respondents can be because they are the ones being helped, they dare not to mark you low, they do not hold the initiative. We have an old saying that if you eat someone else's food, talk good about them, which is exactly true of this situation (our translation from Chinese).

However, one could say that the interpreting team endeavoured to adapt themselves as well as their interpreting product to the situation, increasing the acceptability of the interpretation. Having identified the main problems in this interpreting task (e.g., the disproportionate interpreter-audience ratio and uneven language proficiency of beneficiaries), the interpreting team had a meeting on the second day and decided to adopt several rules to suit the situation like the use of plain English and some local language words when possible (e.g. "Buda-buda" for "three-wheeled motorcycle"), the division of trainees into groups, each with an appointed interpreter ensuring availability and accessibility, as well as the use of volume-enhancing equipment (e.g. speakers borrowed from the staff hotel). Another decision was that of using visuals as a supplementary means of communication. These adaptability methods proved to be rather effective in enhancing interpretation, especially when the language proficiency of the audience was uneven. However, there is also one rule that could be regarded as 'problematic': to interpret only from teachers to trainees but not vice versa when there are not enough interpreters available or time left. This rule strongly evidenced the influence of field on HI, as local interpreters were hired to serve the needs of the benefactors while sacrificing the needs of the beneficiaries. Furthermore, this goes directly against the code of ethics of AIIC (2012), which indicates that interpreters working in perplexed areas must uphold the rule of 'impartiality' to serve all parties equally. Interviewee B, who proposed this rule, explained that:

we know that our budget for interpreters is short and we are short of hands, so we had to adopt some special strategies to ensure the orderly progress of the training class, especially the rule that interpreting for teachers takes priority, I know in daily interpreting practice such rule will be frowned upon, but in a special context, we must resort to a special method (our translation from Chinese).

5. Conclusion

This paper has shed light on the importance of HI in the context of humanitarian aid projects with the niche of a very often adopted and yet seldom examined strategy: relay interpreting. It is revealed by practitioners and participants that the current humanitarian projects often lack consideration for language access, a basic and sometimes decisive factor for the success of a project. Having reviewed the shift of scholarly interest towards interpreters, this paper took Bourdieu's field theory to conceptualise HI and provides a feasible theoretical framework to centre the case study. Data gathered from interviews of the case study are processed through a 4-A rights-based analytic tool. Results reveal that there is a lack of interpreters with working languages other than English capable of relating benefactors and beneficiaries directly. Thus, HI with relay interpreting and English as a lingua franca is often adopted.

By further examining the data through the 4-A rights-based analysis, we also realise that the importance of cross-language communication is recognised, especially when the need of the beneficiaries for language access is seen but not taken into account as it is mainly met through the voluntary actions of interpreters and trainees. This means that there is still much work to be done before



adequate interpreting can be fully recognised as an indispensable component of successful humanitarian projects. There are two main reasons that seem to account for the lack of adequate interpreting. First is the budget, which is mainly allocated to relief goods and other personnel. Second is the lack of awareness that the right to language access is as important as other rights that are guaranteed in a humanitarian project (Baker, C, 2010; Federici and Cadwell, 2018; O'Brien et al., 2018; Delgado Luchner and Kherbiche, 2019; Tesseur and Footitt, 2019). This is because effective communication can determine the success of a training project.

To conclude, there is still much work benefactors need to do about language access in the framework of humanitarian projects. Firstly, awareness of the importance of language access is needed, which means the benefactors should consider bidirectional direct interpreting as an equal right for both parties, as important as other factors like relief goods. Secondly, strategies to guarantee the acceptability of interpreting products. For instance, by allocating more budget to professional interpreters who should plan the interpreting sessions by also providing training to all interpreters, so that all HI needs are addressed, especially those of relay interpreters designated amongst beneficiaries. Lastly, the interpreting service should also endeavour to adapt to the various needs of each project.

Declarations and acknowledgement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix: Pertinent information of interviewees involved

Interviewee	Role in the programme	Gender	Nationality and Language proficiency	Other pertinent information
A	Programme Supervisor	Male	Native Chinese	Deputy head of Department of Commerce of Hunan Province
B	Programme team leader/interpreter	Female	Native Chinese C1 English	Interpreter staff at Department of Commerce of Hunan Province (With MA interpreting degree)
C	Interpreter	Female	Native Chinese C1 English	Contract interpreter(With some interpreting experience)
D	Porcelain-making teacher	Male	Native Chinese	Contract teacher
E	Porcelain-making teacher	Female	Native Chinese	Contract teacher
F	Beneficiary/relay interpreter	Male	Native Sierra Leonean B2 English	Designated relay interpreter with pay (without any training experience in interpreting)
G	Beneficiary	Female	Native Sierra Leonean B2 English	
H	Beneficiary	Male	Native Sierra Leonean B1 English	

