

Ann Corsellis, *Public Service Interpreting. The First Steps*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, 186 pp, £ 60, ISBN 978-1-4039-3799-5

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As the title of this book suggests, *Public Service Interpreting. The First Steps* is an introduction, divided into eight chapters, for the interpreter who is employed, perhaps for the first time, as linguistic mediator between the parties involved in the various forms of people interacting with the public services, i.e., the national health system, the legal system and the social services, as well as for other participants that he or she may interact with. Starting from the obvious premise of globalization and from the current openness of the borders to immigration of all types, the introductory chapter justifies the need for hiring translators and interpreters and gives the basic outline of their activity (*What public services and translators do*), emphasizing the features that sometimes turn it into a rather unenviable field to work in: uncertain opportunities for regular employment (since nobody can anticipate when the need for this and this pair of languages may arise in which domain), scanty possibility of preparation, working conditions, reduced cooperation with the other actors, or simply the attitude according to which translating / interpreting is not really a job – it's just “typing it out in French!”

The second chapter is basically a case study of how the system of interpreting and translation for the public services (PSIT) was developed in the U.K. It starts with a brief history of public service interpreting and translation and a few cases that brought to the fore the need for an expedient and professional approach to interpreting and translating (IT) within the public service area and how the first pilot courses were initiated and implemented in the U.K. in the 80s and early 90s (in which the author herself was involved), prior to the creation of the Association of Community Interpreters (ACI). The most important development was, probably, the fact that this type of activity was admitted among other official trades, with its form of education and degree and diploma system, along with its own standards as set by the National Occupational Standards for Interpreting; a very succinct presentation of the current training institutions is also offered.

While new European guidelines set the general frame for the activity of language services providers (see *The European Standard for translation services* as presented in the document *Standardul european pentru servicii de traducere EN 15038*), in Romania, where training for interpreters in a specialized environment such as public services is still in its early years (the MA in legal translation and terminology at Craiova University does not go farther back than 2004), an accessible and compact introduction to the key points of a code of conduct (pp.34-52) is of great informative value. This is the more so as it is presented through the vantage point of an author whose 25 years' experience in collaborating with the social services (the health service mainly, but also the courts) and the participation in the

various projects that finally lead to establishing equivalent standards in legal interpreting in all European countries offers insight as well as a realistic assessment of what can be done, especially when resources are lean and the institutions sometimes lack awareness of the mediator's importance and his limitations. This code includes aspects related to confidentiality, impartiality, the relation with the party that commissions the interpreter, and truthfulness to content.

Useful advice is offered, accompanied by such anecdotal illustrations that would clarify each issue and extend its applicability; such illustrations, extracted from the author's direct experience with the public services are consistently dispersed throughout the volume. To give one such example, the question is asked – what position should a professional take, when summoned to interpret for a legal practitioner if the suspect questioned tells the interpreter in confidence 'I'm guilty, but don't tell them.', or for a doctor who takes advantage of the fact that the patient knows no English and tells the interpreter 'This patient is a pain in the neck. Can you get her to shut up?' (p.49) This also raises theoretical questions related to the act of interpreting as mere transfer of meaning or a broader view of interpreting as an act including increased subjectivity and active participation in the drama that is unfolding. Associated elements related to good practices are further supplied in Chapters 8 and 9.

Related issues are further on developed in Chapter 5, where "Establishing of a Professional Framework" is discussed. This is directly linked to whether / how interpreting is seen as a profession in its own right, so that it can be subsequently integrated as such, and its practitioners may have the rights and responsibilities associated with other liberal professions which are regulated within an official framework. This comes with a definition of what a profession is (p.84) and a sensible outline of the dangers that come for well-trained, well-meaning practitioners when they come to be associated with flawed performances of untrained suppliers of language services (sometimes doing that under the pressure of ignorant officials who assume that anyone with a basic knowledge of a language is able to act as an interpreter); this framework is of essence to protect interpreters and translators against such situations.

The necessity of creating a central professional body is also argued (p. 90); belonging to such a body also implies compliance to a code of professional conduct / ethics which, when ignored, can lead to disciplinary procedures (which in some countries are apart from the legal consequences legally enforceable) such as the interpreter's being struck out a professional register. Eventually, with the advent of new technological developments that permit distance interaction, an international body and register is also a possibility in the future. Other possible elements of the general framework are touched upon, such as employment structures (and the various employment terms and arrangements) and trade unions, which – varying according to country – offer support the interpreter should be aware of.

A most interesting completion to what has been said so far is Chapter 7, which presents the other side of the story, that is, it introduces certain standards and suggestions for how the other professionals involved in the public services need to interact with the language service providers in order to avoid such situations, approaches, attitudes that can interfere with the interpreters' work and affect the quality of his performance and, indirectly, the welfare of the people at whom the act of interpreting is directed. The key points where collaboration and a basic understanding of the interpreter's work is needed are presented, with an enumeration of the skills required by the personnel employed by the various branches of public services. Special emphasis is laid on the reality of language as only one element in conveying information when cultural content is rich, along with the need for all parties involved to increase their awareness of the cultural factor, especially in areas of multiculturalism such as the U.K. Further suggestions and elements for a code of good practices are also included, for managers who employ interpreters, doctors treating non-natives, starting from such basics as recognizing when an interpreter is needed. Under the circumstances, the author points out, translators and interpreters may find themselves training their clients in aspects related to collaboration with the language professionals, also having an educational role in instances where no previous experience of this sort exists – and often doing that with a good grace, although this is outside their immediate scope.

Combining adroitness and academic accuracy, the book itself is an elegant exercise in language, with a streak of informality which makes the reading both accessible (since its declared intention is that of being an introduction to the domain) and thoroughly enjoyable. An emergency kit for the freelance employed in public service interpreting, possibly also a convenient teaching aid for trainers involved in creating materials or just giving sensible advice to the novice in the public service interpreting. Ann Corsellis' book – unassumingly intended as a practical guidebook for the beginner and a starting point for anyone interested – truly and effectively lays “a foundation for further detailed study and experience” (p. 3), a pithy invitation to self analysis and self development.