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Translating/ed Selves and Voices: Language Support Provisions for Victims of Domestic Violence in a British Third Sector Organization

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Abstract

This article addresses issues of multilingualism in domestic violence support services, building on Tipton (2017a) and findings from a small qualitative study involving an organization in the North West of England. The aim is to shed light on how organizations construct multilingual spaces, the role played by language service provisions in the mediation of such spaces, and how interpreters handle the specificities of working with victims given the lack of available specialist training. The concept of communicative repertoire (following Blommaert and Backus 2011) is introduced to support analysis of supported and autonomous forms of communication in relation to the semiotic practices of survival in their broadest sense, casting new light on the organization's handling of multilingual service delivery and the role of interpreter mediation.

Keywords: communicative repertoires, domestic violence, multilingualism, translation and interpreting

Growing attention to violence against women and girls is reflected in recent scholarship in interpreting studies, particularly through the SOS-VICs project in Spain (e.g., Toledano Buendía and del Pozo Triviño 2015). In Britain, scrutiny of the 43 police constabularies in England and Wales and their response to domestic abuse regardless of gender (see HMIC 2014) has raised its profile nationally and placed a spotlight on

support for individuals with limited language proficiency. Beyond statutory law enforcement and healthcare services, psychosocial support for victims and survivors (counselling, advice on housing, education, welfare entitlements, etc.) is commonly provided through third sector organizations of varying size, scope and geographical coverage, a sector that has received little attention in the interpreting studies literature (see Tipton 2017b).

Although multilingualism is a common characteristic of many third sector domestic violence services, scholarship often neglects its impact on organizational life and, by extension, service user outcomes. In part, this is explained by the fact that, until very recently at least, historical patterns of migration to Britain have generated relatively stable linguistic need, which has been met largely by bilingual staff. The scale and pace of demographic change revealed by the most recent population census in 2011, however, have led organizations in certain urban locations to review language support provisions, drawing attention to the problem identified by Schiller (2015) of how migration and mobilizations of difference are accommodated at the local level.

This is the second article of two (see Tipton 2017a) that explore the findings from a small, qualitative study involving a domestic violence charity federated to Women's Aid in the North West of England. The first article draws on Nussbaum's capabilities theory (1997, 2007) and examines the contractual relations between stakeholders involved in the care of limited language proficient survivors of domestic abuse and how they evolve over a service user's 'institutional itinerary' and 'care trajectory'. This article, by contrast, focuses on the broader set of research questions that shaped the study, namely how organizations construct multilingual space and facilitate personal transformation, the role played by language service provisions in the mediation of such spaces, and how interpreters handle the specificities of working with victims given the lack of available specialist interpreter training.

In what follows, I review the literature on help-seeking practices among migrant groups in relation to the treatment of language and culture in support services, before

exploring a range of impediments to service provision. Insights from sociolinguistic ethnography serve to support investigations of a domestic violence service as one site that constitutes particular patterns of multilingualism, which may be both enabling and disabling in terms of the ability of certain groups to participate (Blommaert et al. 2005; Kerfoot 2011). The concept of communication repertoire (following Blommaert and Backus 2011) is used to capture the movements between supported and autonomous communicative action on the part of service users and other interlocutors, emphasizing the duality and potentiality of translation as something that is both *done to* and *enacted by* the self. The final sections bring together findings from the analysis of semi-structured interviews with staff and freelance interpreters, observations at meetings and drop-in sessions, and reported experiences by former service users to understand the organization of the multilingual space by comparing experiences on the ground with organizational policy and contemporary discourses on translation and migration.

Investigating experiences of minoritized groups in relation to domestic abuse: issues of culture and language

Research on domestic and family abuse among refugee, migrant and ethnic minority populations within and across national contexts presents a mixed picture of prevalence (Morgan and Chadwick 2009; Ghafournia 2011). However, these populations are much less likely to *report* abuse due to the complexities of residency status, isolation, gender norms, family honour, financial insecurity, fear of hostile treatment (e.g., Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Mouzos and Makkai 2004; Bhuyan and Senturia 2005; Keller and Brennan 2007), and limited language proficiency (e.g. Senturia et al. 2000; Bui 2003; Thiara 2005; Runner, Yoshihama and Novick 2009). Bui (2003) also finds that reporting can be impacted by assumptions that the new country of residence lacks understanding of certain groups' particular cultural situation, highlighting the difficulty in attending to such groups without reducing them to stereotypes.

It is clear that, despite this growing body of literature, the role of language and culture in investigating the experiences of limited language proficient service users has yet to be adequately addressed. Critics have highlighted a tendency to over-simplify and, in some cases, over-emphasize the role of culture in explaining the causes of abuse and the provision and take-up of support services among migrant groups. Such approaches promote immigrant cultures as “frozen in time” and underplay the importance of both the structural and cultural environments in which abuse occurs (Sokoloff 2008: 234-35). In other critiques, discourses that position service users from other cultures as a “pathologized presence” (Phoenix 1987) have been shown to increase their visibility and invite scrutiny in ways that risk fostering institutionalized racism and expectations that victims can overcome barriers themselves (Burman et al. 2004). More recent studies underscore the complexity of bilingual and bicultural interlocutory spaces in which survival is discursively mediated, providing a more nuanced reading of culture based on migrant-centered support initiatives (e.g., Yick and Oomen Early 2008); however, the role of translation and interpreting is typically absent from the analysis.

The application of paradigms of cultural psychology in exploring narratives of suffering in cases of sexual violence (e.g., Kallivayalil 2010) and investigations into intra-community linguistic diversity in describing experiences of sexual violence highlight efforts to mitigate stereotyping and support personalized approaches to care. Pande (2013), for example, examines differences in familial and social knowledge and cultural norms among a group of bilingual (UK-based) English and Hindi speakers. The group was asked to translate key words and phrases relating to sexual violence from English into Hindi, which revealed that naming and labelling phenomena could be subject to highly diverse interpretations within the same language community. This has potential significance for processes of disclosure and risk assessment in multilingual services and the level of intervention by interpreters in clarifying meaning. For service providers, it is an indication that the severity of the situation may be much greater than it

appears, thereby warranting additional strategies for effective interlingual communication.

These emically-oriented approaches permit commonality of experience to be highlighted across particular cultural groups and language communities and also provide scope for individual experience to be valorized. In epistemological terms, interpretive knowledge that derives from critical relativist approaches to culture has the potential to enhance user-centered approaches to service delivery. However, the lack of attention to issues of language proficiency, language support policy and provision in the literature suggest that there are important interpretive insights to be gained from elsewhere, not least translation and interpreting studies. Furthermore, what is unclear from much of this research is how multilingual interlocutory spaces are organized and the extent to which they promote service user voice. The importance of this becomes clear when considering that the semiotic practices of survival (building trust, resilience and resemiotization) not only hinge on individual transactional encounters that are discursively (and sometimes interpreter) mediated, but also on wider opportunities for association with others.¹ This is why the study of a single organizational site and its interlocutory subspaces is promoted as a unit of analysis amenable to capturing these interconnected phenomena.

Understanding structural impediments to support for limited language proficient survivors

At the macro level of language service planning, the lack of access to and provision of translation and interpreting reported in many studies belies the emphasis on interlingual communication in instruments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) (Article D125b) and the Council of Europe (2011) Convention (Article 19). The disconnect between provisions and their implementation at meso (local) and micro

¹ Resemiotization is defined as a process of shifts in meaning making between contexts (see Iedema 2003).

(organizational) levels, however, is not limited to services for domestic violence survivors and highlights the complex relation between rights, political will, local implementation, enforcement and community support in more general terms.²

Attempts to emancipate oppressed groups by letting them speak and claim certain rights shed light on the ways in which discourses can constrain individual voice, even where language support provisions exist. For example, Carbin's (2014) study of handbooks and surveys on honor-related violence from the Swedish County Administrative Boards (2003-2010) highlights attempts to include the women and their stories and avoid stereotypes in national policy documents, showing that "the possibility for speaking is formulated within a certain nationalist discursive terrain" (p. 107). She also finds that policy documents present the testimonies in ways that reduce the women to stereotypes, meaning that "they remain impossible to understand" (p. 112).

From a political, legal and contractual perspective, Lee (2013) draws attention to provisions in state, federal laws and regulations in New York City for domestic violence services to be delivered in a "client's best language" (p. 1356); however, interviews with service users reveal that language support is often not available at all or in a timely manner. The fact that the organizations concerned are not routinely held to account can be described as a form of institutional oppression that reinforces marginalization and voicelessness of some service users. To understand why inconsistencies arise and endure, however, requires attention to issues of strategic planning, resource availability and language attitudes, which were beyond the scope of Lee's study.

A third structural impediment concerns communities that are relied upon to support translation and interpreting provision. Research on refugee experiences of domestic violence in Australia by Mason and Pulvirenti (2013) finds that a fear of being ostracized or bringing undue negative attention to a particular cultural group can limit the support available. The authors draw on Khalili's (2007) metaphor of 'papering over',

² The challenge of implementing EU directive 2010/64/EU on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings across all Member States of the European Union is a case in point.

which “[depicts] the way in which individual moments of resilience among refugees can be obscured by larger, more politically persuasive discourses designed to generate a public identity that is believed to be more conducive to the socio-political needs of that community” (Mason and Pulvirenti 2013: 407), and is reflected in the following interview extract:

in certain language we have difficult to find interpreters who want to translate the information about domestic violence...but they refuse – and it’s not ethical – refuse to translate the information because it’s not happen in their community, oh no, no, no. ‘Domestic violence is not happen in our community, no I’m not going to – what you’re doing, you’re going to create a problem in my community with this information’.

(Mason and Pulvirenti 2013: 409)

Finally, the local policy and regulatory environment can generate structural impediments to language service provisions. In Britain, the voluntary or third sector has long played a significant role in delivering support services to vulnerable women (Robinson and Hudson 2011); however, the stability and sustainability of the sector has been impacted by changes to funding and, more recently, by changes to commissioning structures. Language service provisions have featured among structural analyses, albeit peripherally. Heady et al. (2009), for example, found that the additional costs BAMER (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and Refugee) organizations incur, such as interpretation and translation, are often not addressed in funding discussions and can in some cases challenge an organization’s sustainability.

Sustaining difference, enabling transformation

The investigation of multilingual spaces and their transformative potential is usefully informed by recent scholarship in translation studies on the relationship between translation, multilingualism and migration, highlighting the tensions between translation as a practice that creates and maintains difference, and as a practice that facilitates inclusivity while recognizing difference (e.g., Cronin 2006; Polezzi 2012; Yildiz 2012). In this setting, although the transition to independent living may be facilitated by interpreter mediation, its achievement depends to some extent on the gradual reduction of such mediation over time. Elsewhere (Tipton 2017a) I argue that this observation points to an evolution of the contractual relation not commonly accounted for in theorizations of the interpreter's role and impartiality, which often (rightly) assume the primacy of interpreter mediation *throughout* the communicative event. Further, it helps to position the service user as a capable and pro-active communicative agent and also foregrounds the potential pedagogic function of the interpreter who, along with the service provider may reflexively evaluate communicative repertoires and promote the service user's communicative autonomy over time. The preliminary status of these findings, however, needs to be stressed since reliance on self reported experiences and the lack of access to the full range of communicative events in the organization for ethical reasons highlight the methodological limitations of the study in triangulating reported and actual practice; nevertheless, they provide setting-specific insights of a kind not reported in interpreting studies to date.

The focus in what follows is on the extent to which linguistic and wider communicative repertoires (and hence participation) may be enabled and constrained by the organization of multilingual space in relation to drop-in sessions, one-to-one meetings, group sessions, and in temporary accommodation in refuge. The concept of repertoire "allows a move away from imagining languages as clear cut entities" (Busch 2012: 5) and opens the possibility of considering a range of semiotic practices (which include code-switching) in the analysis. At the same time, the concept of repertoire alone cannot account for the ways in which multilingual spaces and repertoires intersect and

evolve. Wei's (2011) concept of "translanguaging space" provides a basis on which to consider moments of personal transformation, but is limited to some extent by being overly predicated on levels of rationalism and communicative competence that are likely to be severely (if only temporarily) diminished due to personal trauma and crisis in these settings.³ It also does not appear to account for potential hierarchies of communicative practice. The fact that there comes a point in a survivor's institutional itinerary where s/he actively needs to resist translation as a 'responsive intervention' points to the reclamation of the body through emerging communicative repertoires that can benefit from complementary theoretical perspectives.⁴

Drawing on Blommaert et al. (2005) I examine the data for evidence of how spaces in organizational life can "be seen as *constitutive* and *agentive* in organizing patterns of multilingualism" (p. 198, original emphasis), as a first stage in understanding communicative repertoire development. These authors argue that a particular organizational environment organizes a particular regime of language, which has the potential to (in-)capacitate individuals. Incapacitation is well illustrated, for instance, by Moyer's (2011) study on multilingual practices in a Barcelona health clinic in which the lack of service-user centered approaches leads to misplaced, and consequently, ineffective helping strategies. The findings raise questions about the evidence base available to third sector (and other) organizations when making strategic decisions about language services planning.

Case study

³ This refers to a space created by the act of translanguaging that brings together "different dimensions of [a multilingual language user's] personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into a coordinated and meaningful performance" (Wei 2011: 1223).

⁴ A term developed by Yaron Matras, March 2017, in the context of a seminar series on multilingualism in institutional sites, Multilingual Manchester, University of Manchester.

The study discussed here forms part of a wider preliminary investigation into interpreter provisions for victims and survivors of domestic violence in police services and the third sector. The almost complete absence of dedicated training, nationally and locally for interpreters in these settings prompted an initial investigation into how interpreter mediation is organized, managed and perceived in both sectors across a range of intercultural and interlingual interactions, from police investigative interviews to informal drop-in services at a charity. The findings are intended to broker a dialogue with key stakeholders about the planning and use of language services in their respective sectors and inform future survivor-centred research on achieving effective service outcomes.

The voluntary sector partner organization in the study is located in the North West of England and federated to Women's Aid, an umbrella organization that brings together various support services and campaigns for greater public awareness of domestic violence. Most service users are referred to the organization through statutory services in the city and dedicated campaigns to raise awareness of the service among the local community. Data collection involved a desktop survey of available policy documents on translation and interpreting provisions (including website analysis), interviews with staff and interpreters, observation of staff meetings, a service user forum, and drop-in sessions over a six-month period, and attendance at a volunteer interpreter training event. Individual interviews with former service users were included in the initial research design, but proved difficult to arrange as many no longer lived in the area. However, this was mitigated to some extent by attendance at an interpreter training event involving four former service users. All data collection activities were subject to ethical approval processes at the University of Manchester.

Interviews with staff were arranged through the BAMER service manager by names being put forward for the researcher to contact. In total eight names were forwarded and, of these, four agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately one hour, which took place at different service sites; all but one

interviewee gave permission for the interview to be recorded (see Appendix 1 for the topic guide).

The study also involved semi-structured interviews with freelance interpreters who have worked extensively with the organization and other services in the area supporting survivors of domestic violence such as courts, police, homeless families and social services (see Appendix 2 for the topic guide). The six interpreters were invited to participate by a local translation and interpreting service provider on the basis of their direct experience in interpreting (10-20 years in each case), and specifically at the organization in question. They were paid at the established freelance rate for their time. It is of note that all interpreters in the sample were female in this case. Additional interviews were sought with interpreters who had worked for the organization via a telephone interpreting provider, but the provider declined to be involved in the study. A more representative sample of gender would therefore be desirable in future studies.

Not all interpreters wished the interviews to be recorded; therefore notes were taken in two cases. All recorded interviews were transcribed and, owing to the small sample size, manually coded by the researcher. The semi-structured interview provided scope for the interpreters to introduce topics not included in the researcher's topic guide, as a result of which the following themes emerged as salient across the sample: emotional labour of the interpreter, knowledge of the community, and communication management in meetings involving perpetrators and survivors. The thematic approach to data analysis more generally was shaped by the following research questions:

- how does the organization, its interpreters and service users construct and sustain multilingual spaces?
- what patterns of multilingualism can be discerned and what implications do they have for the way in which translation and interpreting are organized and valorized by the organization and its service users?
- what type of service user participation is enabled / constrained by the organization's approach to language service provisions?

Policy as a regulatory framework

A single site study provides a unit of analysis for investigating the interconnections between regulatory frameworks, the management's interpretation of such frameworks, and practice and perception on the ground. The Women's Aid 2015 (revised) national quality standards are a key point of reference in relation to language services provision. The standards promote inclusivity, stating that no woman will be disadvantaged by her limited language proficiency. Aside from the mission statement, the standards provide no detailed guidelines on commissioning services, strategies for handling effective interlingual and intercultural communication or monitoring quality. Federated organizations commonly draw on the services of the same telephone interpreting provider for some communicative events and in-person provisions are sourced from a variety of local providers; both sources of language support show awareness of the importance of professional provision as a pattern of the multilingual regime.

The study coincided with discussions about the role of former service users in supporting the organization's activities. I attended a staff meeting in which the importance of service user outcomes were discussed with specific reference to the way these are identified and reported to funders. The emphasis on service users being able to demonstrate understanding of the consequences of their decision-making underscored the importance of professional language support provisions due to the level of risk involved. At the same time, emphasis was placed on encouraging service users to use English wherever possible to develop confidence. These observations show the importance of adopting both a needs-led and an outcomes-led approach to language service planning. An outcomes-based approach, however, requires further interrogation of the interpreter's role and potential pedagogic function in theoretical terms. In other words, the need for interpreters to sometimes withdraw from the communicative event (even if only temporarily) challenges traditional views of their role, as they become

agents of a particular pattern of multilingual practice as the situation evolves. Arguably, this can be theorised under the coordinating function (e.g., Wadensjö 1998) but it appears to go beyond the type of coordination of others' talk that is commonly accounted for in descriptive interpreting studies and in documents such as the Code of Professional Conduct of the National Register of Public Service Interpreters (revised 2016) and the National Occupational Standards in Interpreting (currently under review). In terms of strategic planning, the study's preliminary findings in relation to outcomes-based approaches therefore merit further empirical investigation.

The organization as a multilingual site: virtual and material observations

The desktop survey included scrutiny of the organization's website, although for reasons of literacy and access to technology it is unlikely to be the main vector through which limited language proficient service users make contact. Its online presence nevertheless acknowledges the diversity of service users by including a prominent tab for 'other languages'. However, at the time of writing the link is not functional, making it impossible to gauge what information is available or the range of languages and language varieties it is available in. The website does provide information on language support, however, making it clear that support is delivered through professional translation and interpreting services and bilingual staff (and includes a list of languages spoken by staff). Although no official language support policy is promoted online, the role of the Senior Management Team in developing such support across the organization's activities is evidenced through the interview data, in response to the question about how language provision had changed over time at the organization:

Extract 1

We've had leaflets printed in different languages, which is great because that never used to happen. So I think [the senior management team is] concerned

about women being targeted: posters, leaflets, the website... You click a button and it will come up in different languages...and I think they try to make sure that interpreters are there for some of the big occasions, so women can have a voice in the forums, in the meetings... they always try to make sure there's an interpreter there, so I think they do try to cater across the board really for all our service users.

(Refuge worker 1)

In material terms, in addition to refuges that provide temporary accommodation to the most at-risk service users, the organization has a dedicated physical site where it handles risk assessments, drop-in services, one-to-one and group sessions. Despite the increased availability of translated materials mentioned above, there were none on display at the site, nor were any on display in one of the refuges visited as part of the study. In fact, the main service site contains no outwardly visible multilingual signs in general terms. This does not suggest that there is a bias towards English language proficient speakers; on the contrary, the site can be described as largely text-free. For limited language proficient speakers, then, the physical environment arguably presents a non-threatening space in which the lack of text-based material reduces processes of 'othering' and "[de-emphasizes] written text as the semiotics of power" (Kerfoot 2011: 98).

The temporary construction of interlocutory spaces in the various sites means that the patterns of multilingualism change from week to week (e.g., through the presence of bilingual support workers, professional interpreters and volunteer interpreters), impacting on the nature and range of communicative repertoires in use at any one time by staff and service users alike. Some service users attend drop-in sessions with interpreters, but many attend on their own, attesting to the potential power of this space in terms of co-presence and association. Service users often come together over food and drink, sometimes even participating in food preparation, leading individuals to

engage with otherness through embodied communication (see Parasecoli 2011). At the same time, culinary interactions in refuges are described in the notes taken in one interpreter interview as being potential sources of tension, since unfamiliar cooking habits and smells can encroach on the private space of service users, impacting on mood and willingness to engage in interpersonal interaction. This draws attention to the liberating and constraining impact of space on service users at different points in their institutional itinerary.

Translation and inclusivity: a double-edged sword

Activities from arts and crafts to more structured group activities that support coming to terms with past trauma and planning ahead for the future are a core element of service offer in the organization. Attempts to promote inclusivity by bringing all black and minority ethnic service users together, however, can inhibit rather than enable participation owing to variability in English language proficiency. In other words, monolingualism that is foregrounded in group work needs to be viewed in relation to hierarchies of proficiency as the following extract suggests:

Extract 2

I think we should just have a BME [black and minority ethnic] group and not a mixed [BAMER] group... at the minute they're mixed and I think women with language difficulties have difficulty... so, it can be a black British-born woman, with a strong [local] accent speaking really quickly – I can understand what she's saying but the other women can't quite grasp what she's saying... they can't understand her accent, she's too fast as well, and they haven't got a clue what's going on.

(Refuge worker 1)

In discussing the management of limited language proficiency in interviews with staff, service users were reported as having expressed a preference to participate in groups involving individuals from majority and minority groups; however, the involvement of interpreters as a potential impediment to in-group solidarity was highlighted:

Extract 3

And there was people saying about bringing white women in, we did – but we didn't agree with it – and the white women were saying... 'white women', that sounds awful! ...were saying it's too slow, we've got to wait for the interpreters to interpret.

(Refuge worker 1)

The extract shows a high degree of self-reflexivity on the part of the staff member in reproducing the language of the service user to show that it clearly conflicts with the organization's categorizations. It shows that service users do not always understand the implications of limited language proficiency or its potential impact on their experience. It also raises questions as to how multilingualism is presented to and constructed by the wider service user group and how expectations are managed, since for some service users multilingualism can serve as a barrier to processes of 'self translation' (i.e., those who are language proficient).

The staff interview accounts and the staff meetings also stress the importance of service users taking advantage of group work following one-to-one support in building the confidence to move forward. In this regard, the accounts show that participation is not contingent on interpreter provision and, even if the linguistic and communicative

repertoire is very limited, the perceived benefits of partial participation and autonomy of communication are expressed across the interviews: ⁵

Extract 4

We've got one at group at the moment, that you know, she's from [name removed], very minimal English, will sit in group and try and understand, pushes herself. And if that means she only gets the first 15 minutes of what we do in that two hour session, she's come, she's tried to make an effort and slowly, I've explained to her, 'it'll make sense, you have to keep pushing yourself because this is the only way you're going to learn'. Listening to other women talk about their experiences of domestic abuse, you know, you think she's not getting it and then she'll go 'yes, the same happened to me', so it's the best way. And often women, even from the [name removed] community, will understand exactly what you're saying in that sort of setting, but are not able to say it themselves because they don't know what words to use so... they, they get it.

(BAMER support worker)

This extract and others in the data suggest that the staff intuitively develop a sense of the translanguaging practices of service users over time and their relative effectiveness.⁶

This is supported by reference to communication between women in refuge:

Extract 5

If [limited language proficient] women end up going into refuge, they then learn off the other women that are in refuge.

⁵ The rolling programme of group sessions means that service users have multiple opportunities to participate and cover the same ground at a later point.

⁶ Translanguaging is more than code-switching and denotes "[t]he dynamic process whereby multilingual language users mediate complex social and cognitive activities through strategic employment of multiple semiotic resources to act, to know and to be" (García and Wei 2014).

(Refuge Worker 1)

In this regard it is of note that the staff report very few service users arriving at the organization without knowing any English at all. Translation and interpreting appear therefore in some cases therefore to serve as a device for gauging language and communicative competency, enabling staff to make decisions about when service user autonomy or professional language support is warranted. Extract 4 also suggests that limited communicative repertoires do not always impede participation or diminish the benefits of group meaning making for such individuals. The interpreter interviews further confirm the need to foster language awareness as a means to support longer-term service user outcomes as the following extract from an interpreter interview suggests:

Extract 6

It is very important that... when I say for example, the 'bedroom tax' – I don't need to explain it every time so this is part of encouraging the client as well when he or she is doing their ESOL classes, 'cos we are not there forever for them. The service is short-lived, even 6 months or a year it is a short time and that's it.

(Interpreter 1)

Enabling/constraining participation: interpreter and service user perspectives

It is reasonable to assume that professional language support is facilitative of optimal communication and meets an identified service user need; however, the relation cannot be considered axiomatic due to the complex and unstable emotional state of service users, contextual factors and shifts in service user communicative repertoires over time. In other words, interpretation may be viewed with suspicion and in some cases rejected,

especially in the rapport building phases with service users. One interpreter account mentions the vagaries of limited understanding in early phases of the care trajectory:

Extract 7

Because of the language barrier that the women suffer they sometimes become paranoid and ...misunderstand what is being said. Somehow [one survivor] understood ... that they are gonna take her child away...she jumped out of the window of the second floor, broke her foot and the child had a fractured skull....she had not understood what the refuge workers were saying.

(Interpreter 2)

Several interpreter accounts mention service users withholding permission for the interpreter to 'voice' them unless personal information about community connections is first disclosed. In the cases reported, such scenarios appeared to arise most in cases where several family members were present at a meeting (usually involving a solicitor in matters of child custody) and sought to maintain control over communication and participation. The individuals making the most demands tend to be those with reasonable language proficiency, and their interventions were described in one interpreter's account as often impacting the whole interactive process and a deliberate attempt to undermine the interpreter:

Extract 8

Sometimes, you know, there is a factor of intimidation – others, sometimes they think that they know law and they know the terminology and they say 'no', they start using their fingers and hands...[they tell me] what this word means, yes, but [I say] 'this is what the lady means' ... they do challenge you, you know, as if you are there just to identify things or explain things'

(Interpreter 2)

These accounts highlight the potential for the multilingual space as a site of contestation and potential manipulation by individuals who have the advantage of plurilingual competence and use it to diminish the voice of those who do not have such competence (also identified in child welfare cases involving interpreters, see Tipton and Furmanek 2016). In meetings involving survivors on their own, by contrast, manipulation of the interpreter can also occur in other ways that challenge their impartiality but that need to be understood from the perspective of the service user's fear of not being believed. For instance, one interpreter reported being asked to speak on behalf of the service user on a fairly regular basis:

Extract 9

How many times a client will say 'just put some words from you' just, you know make it a little bit spicier for them, 'support me with whatever sentence you can say.'

(Interpreter 2)

The emotional impact of working with survivors is extensively foregrounded across the interpreter interviews, particularly where children are involved and in some respects may constitute a barrier to service user participation. The advantage of the semi-structured interview was evident in this regard as the reflections on the emotional labour of the interpreter were provided unprompted, highlighting the value of the interviewee having space to direct the interview in ways that reflect issues important to her. The notes taken in an interview with one interpreter include an example of a service user using the opportunity of the pre-meeting monolingual conversation to disclose information about extreme violence to which she had been subjected. The interpreter

found it very difficult to compose herself in the meeting that followed, made worse by the lack of specialist training in working with trauma victims. Additionally, changing moods of the service user, especially in refuge contexts make this area of work particularly challenging for interpreters. An example is given by another interpreter of a service user who was admonished by refuge staff for not respecting the 'no smoking' regulations. The mood swing that ensued in the interpreter-mediated encounter took a turn for the worse as the service user tried to harm herself in her room before taking to her bed. The data show that interpreters working in these settings do grow accustomed to service user mood change and unpredictability, but that that this could still be a barrier to communication:

Extract 10

Even with a current client you can't say 'I know that client' because you have to take it one day at a time.

(Interpreter 3)

Limited access to service users during the study precluded the gathering of individual interview data among this population. However, the drop-in sessions permitted some observation, and attendance at a training event for volunteer interpreters involving former service users provided a window on their experiences of interpreter mediation. I observed three drop-in sessions (6 hours in total) involving service users with highly variable language proficiency and included speakers of Panjabi, Urdu, Vietnamese, Amharic, Czech, Polish and Arabic; in none of the sessions was a professional interpreter present.

The drop-in session posed several methodological challenges for the researcher in terms of bias and reactivity. I was asked to introduce myself to the group on each occasion at the start of the drop-in time and invited individuals to approach me if they

had experiences that they thought I would be interested in hearing about, mindful that this was a space of safety and primarily of interactions between service users who wanted to meet friends and sustain relationships. However, the small scale of the space and the small number of service users (between 4 and 12 typically over the two hour period of the drop-in) meant that I was a highly visible presence. It was common for the same service users to attend, which limited the range of experiences I was exposed to. The fact that service users quickly settled into interactions with the same people on each occasion suggests that I was not an undue focus of attention; however, those that did talk about their experiences of interpreter mediation tended to cite examples of interactions outside of the organization and may therefore be indicative of the impact of my presence. The opportunity to move around the space and the ‘back regions’ (the kitchen area) avoided unwarranted intrusions on established groupings and permitted ad hoc conversations that provided a range of insight that an interview with pre-set questions may not have captured otherwise.

Interactions between regular drop-in service users and new arrivals showed the importance of the physical environment and non-verbal gestures in the creation of cultures of safety. A new arrival who had minimal English proficiency was welcomed by a service user who pulled a chair back from the table and patted it firmly, inviting the person to take a seat, saying “it doesn’t matter why you are here, I don’t need to know...come and sit with us.” I was similarly struck by the level of communication between speakers of very limited proficiency. Regular attendance at the drop-in showed how friendships emerged between service users of different language backgrounds and culture through exchanges that appeared incomprehensible but did not seem to hinder communication. The additional presence of young children and babies was a source of attention that enabled a range of non-verbal interactions between participants.

In addition to the drop-in sessions I also attended a training session for volunteer interpreters during which four service users from the Indian subcontinent described how limited opportunities to practice spoken English in their country of origin meant that

they relied on the services of interpreters on arrival. However, their prior education in English meant that they had very reasonable comprehension skills, which allowed them to critically appraise the quality of service received. All four individuals had experienced instances where the quality of interpreting was poor due to gaps in information transfer and distortions in the message content, particularly, but not exclusively in immigration settings. These experiences and the desire to provide a better service had prompted them to sign up for the volunteer interpreter scheme. The group also commented on the limited availability of female interpreters and lack of gender matching in reporting phases (e.g., involving police), which they described as having had a significant impact on them and other service users' in terms of willingness to disclose. While there was no evidence of the 'papering over' mentioned earlier in relation to Mason and Pulvirenti's (2013) findings in Australia, it nevertheless shows that barriers to females from some communities putting themselves forward to train as interpreters appear to persist.

Evidence of strategic planning

The data evidences the importance the organization attaches to professional interpreting and translation services in meeting service user need. It is clear that the funding regime guided the strategic decisions in this regard, since demonstrating to funders that service users were able to understand and articulate the reasons for their decisions (e.g., in court cases) was something that needed to be monitored closely. However, the patterns of language services provision reported in the data do not necessarily facilitate participation of all service users. The case of the language proficient users described earlier is salient in this regard. Reflections by service users on interpreting being "too slow" show how a mechanism that is designed to support inclusiveness can also lead to alienation. In the context of services in which service users share common experiences of a highly traumatic nature, this observation is not without significance. Staff need to navigate group dynamics in service planning and delivery to ensure outcomes are achieved

optimally, even though this may involve divisions according to categories that seem to promote difference rather than transcend it. Staff showed clear awareness of this, but seemingly had not factored it into their strategic planning.

There was no evidence in the staff interviews of local language provision policy being influenced by wider practices in the federation of Women's Aid organizations, aside from perhaps telephone interpreting services, which are particularly used in initial risk assessments for urgent cases referred and self referrals. At the time of the study, the emphasis on strategic planning chiefly concerned the development of the volunteer scheme as a means to further boost former service user confidence and raise aspirations about educational and career opportunities in this area. Newer staff members indicated that the numbers of new referrals requiring interpreter mediation could feel quite overwhelming at times, and the two staff members who attended the volunteer interpreter training spoke of the benefits of hearing about experiences from former service users themselves. This suggests that joint training initiatives is something for the organization to consider in relation to staff development.

Conclusion

This article highlights the relative neglect of issues of multilingualism in the domestic violence literature and focuses attention on interpreting provision and the development of communicative repertoires in the context of one organization. The nature and range of interactions which take place across the interlocutory spaces of group-work, drop-in sessions and communal spaces in refuges are commonly excluded from the interpreting studies literature which tends to privilege discrete communicative events. It is these 'below the radar' events that arguably contribute to the culture of safety and support the semiotic practices of survival.

The observations show service user participation can take the simple form of co-presence and, even though an individual's communicative repertoire only permits

minimal interaction, not all interlocutory spaces are aimed at informational transaction; the feeling of safety generated by co-presence with others who have had similar experiences serves as an important source of support. In such cases, the absence of interpreter mediation (whether professional or nonprofessional) cannot automatically be viewed as an impediment to the achievement of some service user outcomes.

The case study yields insight into the nature of interlocutory spaces available to victims and survivors and the ways in which such spaces may be navigated; however, methodologically it presents a number of challenges in terms of access and representativeness. There is clear scope for some of the issues raised by this study to be further investigated using ethnographic methods over a longer period of time to identify how staff and service users navigate them in practice; in particular the nature of translanguaging. In this respect methods used in sociolinguistics such as observing an individual in different spaces of interaction over time may be useful, although the special sensitivities of this setting may preclude such a method in practice.

The importance of valorizing the range of communicative repertoires in the service user's contact with an organization provides a new lens through which to evaluate interpreting and translation as both a needs-led and outcomes-led approach to issues of multilingualism, the need for which is reflected in the following extract:

usually when women come in refuge they're on the floor, so the aim is to get them up, assess what they need, and then do whatever you can to get them where they need to go, and eventually then they go out into the community and carry on with their life.

(BAMER support worker)

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