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The Community Interpreter's Role: Students' Perceptions in the Context of Growing Needs in Türkiye

Türkiye'de Artan Toplum Çevirmenliği İhtiyaçları Bağlamında Çevirmenin Rolüne İlişkin Öğrenci Görüşleri

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to assess community interpreting students' perceptions of the interpreter's role. The migrant and refugee population in Türkiye has grown following global developments, wars and crises in the country's neighbouring geography. This has increased the need for community interpreters who play a key role in overcoming language and communication barriers between the host community and foreigners. Growing community interpreting needs requires adjusting the structure and content of community interpreting courses offered at the academic level in the relevant university programmes. As future community interpreters, students' understanding of and attitude towards the community interpreter's role is vital for their effective performance of the job and the tasks it entails. This study utilises data collected from 14 community interpreting students enrolled in the Department of Translation and Interpreting at a state university. The students' perceptions of the community interpreter's role, task boundaries, and status were explored through an open-ended questionnaire including scenarios based on ethical dilemmas that community interpreters may face in different contexts and a Likert scale survey designed accordingly. The data were analysed under the following headings: communication issues, conveying emotions, impartiality and neutrality, addressing cultural differences, and managing power differentials. The analysis revealed findings pointing to the transgression of the boundaries of the mechanistic role traditionally attributed to interpreters. This indicates a developing awareness among the students of the mediating role of interpreters as active agents in different humanitarian contexts. It is hoped that the findings will contribute to the structure and content of community interpreting courses offered in the relevant programmes of higher education institutions and to prospective students' understanding of the community interpreter's role.

Keywords: Community interpreting needs, community interpreter's role, community interpreting training, ethical dilemmas, student perceptions

ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı toplum çevirmenliği öğrencilerinin toplum çevirmeninin rolüne ilişkin algılarını tespit etmektir. Türkiye'deki göçmen ve mülteci nüfusu komşu coğrafyada yaşanan savaş ve krizler sonrasında ve küresel gelişmeler nedeniyle oldukça artmıştır. Bu durum, ev sahibi toplum ile yabancılar arasındaki dil ve iletişim engellerinin aşılmasında kilit rol oynayan toplum çevirmenlerine olan ihtiyacı da artırmıştır. Kapsamı genişleyen toplum çevirmenliği ihtiyaçları üniversitelerde ilgili bölümlerde akademik düzeyde sunulan toplum çevirmenliği derslerinin yapısının ve içeriğinin aynı doğrultuda güncellenmesini gerektirmektedir. Bu kapsamda toplum çevirmeni adayları olan çeviri bölümü öğrencilerinin göçler ve kriz durumlarının ön plana çıkardığı çevirmenin rolünü kavrayış biçimleri çevirmenlik mesleğini ve gerektirdiği görevleri etkili ve verimli icraları açısından elzemdir. Bu çalışma bir devlet üniversitesinde Mütercim ve Tercümanlık Bölümünde toplum çevirmenliği dersini alan 14 öğrenciden toplanan verilere dayanır. Öğrencilerin toplum çevirmeninin rolü ve görevleri ile statüsüne ilişkin algıları toplum çevirmenlerinin farklı bağlamlarda karşılacabilecekleri etik ikilem durumlarına dayalı senaryolar içeren açık uçlu soru formu ile aynı doğrultuda tasarlanmış Likert ölçekli anket aracılığyla araştırılmıştır. Elde edilen veriler iletişim hususları, duyguların aktarımı, tarafsızlık ve yansızlık, kültürel farklılıkların ele alınması ve güç farklılıklarının yönetimi başlıkları altında incelenmiştir. İnceleme sonucunda tercümanlara geleneksel olarak atfedilen mekanik rol sınırlarının aşıldığına işaret eden bulgular ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu durum, tercümanların farklı insani yardım bağlamlarında aktif aktörler olarak üstlendikleri rollere ilişkin öğrenciler arasında gelişen bir farkındalığa işaret etmektedir. Bulguların, yükseköğretim kurumlarının ilgili programlarında sunulan toplum çevirmenliği derslerinin yapısına ve içeriğine ve öğrencilerin toplum çevirmeninin rolünü anlayışına katkıda bulunacağı umulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplum çevirmenliği gereksinimleri, toplum çevirmeninin rolü, toplum çevirmenliği eğitimi, etik ikilemler, öğrenci görüşleri

1. Introduction

Due to its geopolitical position, turmoil and conflicts in its immediate geography affect Türkiye to a great extent (Polat Ulaş, 2024). These circumstances and global processes have brought many refugees and migrants to Türkiye after the early 2000s. The main migrant groups include Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan, and Ukrainian refugees, as well as Russian and European tourists who are in the country for various reasons such as vacation, education, and trade. Furthermore, improved healthcare services and emergencies and disasters, such as earthquakes, bring different groups of foreigners into the country for short periods. Community interpreting, which is of key importance in overcoming communication barriers for foreign groups unable to speak the country's language, has received more attention in Türkiye recently. The need for interpreting services, particularly in healthcare and judicial institutions as well as in emergency contexts requires academic programmes, which are of great value in the training of community interpreters, to tailor their relevant courses correspondingly.

Community interpreting, which developed in countries such as Australia and Sweden in the 1960s for immigrants and minorities of different ethnic backgrounds, has gained significance in other European countries with increasing international migration after the 1980s (Pöchhacker, 2004, p. 30). The fact that interpreters take charge in conflicts, crises, and humanitarian emergencies has demonstrated the assistance and social work aspects of community interpreting and has thus blurred the role definitions and task boundaries of interpreters. In this regard, numerous studies investigating the roles and tasks of interpreters in communication processes have shown that interpreters can undertake multifaceted roles and tasks other than interpreting (Angelelli, 2004a; Barsky, 1996; Berk-Seligson, 1990; Bot, 2003; Bulut & Kurultay, 2001; Davidson, 2000; Hale, 2008; Hsieh, 2006; Jiang et al., 2014; Kadric, 2000; Kaufert & Koolage, 1984; Leanza, 2005; Morris, 1995; Niska, 1995; Pöchhacker, 2000; Roy, 1993; Souza, 2016; Wadensjö, 1998). These studies have revealed that the norms of invisibility and complete neutrality traditionally attributed to interpreters do not correlate with their actual interpreting performance in crises and emergencies.

Despite its growing importance and relevance, the barriers to the professionalisation and status of community interpreting remain a matter of debate. Studies suggest that community interpreting is not yet in its due position for several reasons, including inadequate training programmes, a general lack of awareness of the function and importance of community interpreting, and a lack of systems to ensure professional standards (Corsellis, 2008; Hale, 2015; Rudvin, 2015). Under the circumstances, institutions offering translation and interpreting education at the academic level have a great responsibility to train community interpreters in line with the increasing needs and raise awareness in all segments of society. First offered in the translation and interpreting programmes of Boğaziçi, Istanbul, and Hacettepe Universities in Türkiye, community interpreting courses have been included in the curricula of most of the relevant academic programmes that have rapidly increased in number in recent years (Arslan & Durdağı, 2018; Ross, 2018). However, there is still a distance to cover to improve the content and scope of these courses.

In this respect, this study examines the perspectives of students who attended a community interpreting course offered in the Department of Translation and Interpreting at a public higher education institution. Data collected through an open-ended questionnaire including scenarios based on ethical dilemmas that community interpreters may face in different settings and a Likert scale survey will be used to explore the students' perceptions of the community interpreter's role, tasks, and status. The findings, which are hoped to contribute to the scope and content of community interpreting courses offered at the academic level and to prospective interpreters' understanding of the role of the community interpreter, will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

2. Debate on Interpreter Roles

The fact that community interpreting is a form of interpreting performed in delicate humanitarian situations imposes many constraints on interpreters and might require them to go beyond the passive role traditionally attributed to them (Pöchhacker, 2004, p. 147). Complex tasks that interpreters have to fulfil in a wide range of social contexts, bidirectional interaction processes, conflicting expectations of the parties, and institutional, ethical, and bureaucratic constraints obscure the task boundaries and positions of interpreters. Hence, the literal mechanistic translation function (Knapp-Potthoff & Knapp, 1986, p. 152; Tipton, 2014) has been questioned for years to highlight the social aspect of community interpreting, the broader role boundaries of interpreters, and the discretionary power and agency of interpreters.

The dynamic role of the community interpreter is most frequently discussed in the healthcare domain, which is more closely associated with immediate emergencies. In this vein, Angelelli (2004a), in her seminal study on the role perceptions and (in)visibility of healthcare interpreters, uses a variety of interesting metaphors to characterise the roles that interpreters assume. Based on the linguistic and cultural issues that interpreters address in communication, she proposed such metaphors as "multi-purpose bridge", "miner", "diamond connoisseur", and "detective". In another study on the roles of interpreters in different settings, including healthcare, court, and conference, Angelelli (2004b) found that healthcare interpreters undertook more active roles in communications processes. A variety of tasks were fulfilled by the interpreters, ranging from setting communication rules to controlling the flow of interaction between participants, from aligning with one of the communication participants to building trust between them.

Similarly, based on the healthcare interpreters' manner of engagement with the communication parties and their approach to the parties' cultural values and norms, Leanza (2005) suggested a typology including four different roles: system agent, integration agent, community agent, and linguistic agent. In addition, Souza (2016) suggested that healthcare interpreters acted as intercultural mediators in the hospital environment, assuming diverse roles such as "welcomers", "bilingual professionals", "community agents", "cultural informants", and "educators". In the same regard, Hsieh (2006) found that communication practises of other parties, institutional constraints, and the parties' unrealistic expectations led interpreters to deviate from the conduit role. Likewise, Kaufert and Putsch (1997) observed that the health-related cultural values and frames of the communicating parties affected the roles that interpreters assumed, leading to ethical dilemmas. Pöchhacker (2000) found that interpreters went beyond interpreting and took on tasks such as explaining cultural issues and technical terms and notifying parties of misunderstandings.

In interpreting for mental health, a specific discipline of the healthcare field, research indicates that interpreters take multiple roles beyond interpreting and role conflicts can contribute to their emotional distress (Geiling et al., 2023; Miller et al., 2005). Bot (2003), challenging the applicability of ethical guidelines that assume interpreters as neutral machines, concluded that in psychological therapy sessions, interpreters played active roles that other parties recognised. Similarly, Resera et al. (2015) observed that interpreters in mental health encounters assumed highly sophisticated roles. Interpreters were found to act as "active translators", "cultural informants", "co-constructionist", and "(almost) therapists". The study also argues that the relationship that interpreters developed with service users based on their shared origins posed a significant dilemma to the prescribed invisible role. In contrast, interpreters developed empathy with service users and a desire to assist them.

Pöchhacker (2004) argues that the neutral machine role attributed to interpreters stems partly from the requirement to refrain from "interpreting" the meaning in court interpreting (emphasis in the original, p. 147). However, studies have demonstrated that judicial interpreters also engage in practises that subvert the said role. Hale (2008), challenging the machine metaphor in court interpreting, suggested five roles for interpreters: "advocate for the minority language speaker", "advocate for the institution or the service provider", "gatekeeper", "facilitator of communication", and "faithful renderer of others' utterances". Kadric (2000) found that interpreters often had sufficient manoeuvring space to make decisions independently. In his study, in which he examined the interpretation of the applicant interviews in refugee hearings, Barsky (1996) identified interpreters as "intercultural agents", noting the different tasks they undertook, such as elaborating on refugees' statements. Similarly, focusing on interpreting in barrister-defendant

interviews, Jiang et al. (2014) revealed a decision-making continuum that provides insights into the complex and social role of the interpreter through discourse interpreting filters. Last but not least, Mikkelson (1998) claims that court interpreters, having received relevant training and having gained expertise, can become competent in using professional judgement and intervening prudently in cases where communication is interrupted and thus cannot be considered a translation machine.

In Türkiye, a growing body of empirical research focuses on the diverse roles of community interpreters in different settings. Studies on interpreters in healthcare have yielded many findings indicating that interpreters go beyond the invisible neutral role. It was found that interpreters may tend to take sides with patients and assume a less objective role (Duman, 2018), that interpreters are active and authorised participants in communication processes (Şener Erkırtay, 2021), that they take the initiative in coordination processes assuming the role of cultural mediators (Öztürk, 2015), and that they perform additional tasks such as accompanying patients within healthcare institutions (Polat Ulaş, 2021b). One study interestingly revealed that interpreting is almost perceived as an additional task by healthcare interpreters due to role ambiguity and conflict (Güzel, 2022). The relatively few studies on interpreters in the judicial field similarly uncovered the visible role of interpreters at all stages of the judicial process, contrary to what has traditionally been assumed (Aral Duvan, 2021; Polat Ulaş, 2021a; Yücel, 2018). Finally, in studies on emergency and disaster interpreting, which is performed especially in the aftermath of natural disasters such as earthquakes and which adopts volunteerism as a basic principle, it is suggested that interpreters can take initiatives in disaster sites (Doğan & Kahraman, 2011), that their task description needs to be expanded to include communicative coordination and that they can act as cultural mediators adopting a psychological and social response (Bulut & Kurultay, 2001).

Overall, research on community interpreting has shown that the neutral, passive, and invisible role envisioned for interpreters cannot be performed under all circumstances due to communicative, social, and institutional factors, even by those who are identified professionals (Hsieh, 2003). This study, through the role perceptions of community interpreting students, intends to contribute to discussions revolving around the various roles and tasks that interpreters can undertake in multi-layered and complex crises and emergencies.

3. Aim and Method

This study aims to assess the community interpreting students' perceptions of the interpreter's role. By providing insights into understanding the community interpreter's role, the study intends to contribute to community interpreting curricula in the relevant programmes of higher education institutions and lend to relevant skills of prospective students who are candidates to perform community interpreting jobs. To this end, data were collected from the fourth-year students attending an elective community interpreting course that was offered in the fall semester of the 2023-2024 academic year in the English Translation and Interpreting undergraduate programme of a state university. The relevant course was designed and taught by the researcher. The expected outcomes of the course were to familiarise students with the function of community interpreting, the role, tasks, and responsibilities of community interpreters, and ethical issues in community interpreting, as well as to provide students with skills and experience in interpreting between foreigners/immigrants and public officials in public institutions such as healthcare and judicial authorities. Thus, the course was designed to include lectures on the function and history of community interpreting and its status in different countries based on reading materials and presentations. An important part of the course consisted of a comparative examination of various ethical guidelines and discussions of the role and task boundaries of the community interpreter through video-based scenarios. Finally, the course structure included scenarios and role-plays to enable students to apply their theoretical learning to interpreting, especially in healthcare and judicial contexts, and to gain a degree of experience, albeit in a virtual environment.

With the mentioned aim of the present study in mind, the research was designed to include tools to collect exploratory and descriptive data. Ethical approval was obtained from the Adana Alparslan Türkeş Science and Technology University Research and Publication Ethics Board before the start of the research, which was based on participant volunteerism and anonymity of the data. Students' perceptions of the community interpreter's role, task boundaries, and status were explored through an open-ended questionnaire including scenarios based on ethical dilemmas that community interpreters may face in different settings and a 5-point Likert scale survey designed in line with the said scenarios. The questionnaire and survey items were based on the relevant body of literature and insights gained from the interviews with practising interpreters in the author's previous study (Amato & Mack 2017; Angelelli, 2004b; Lai et al., 2015; Merlini & Gatti, 2015; Polat Ulaş, 2021a; Pöchhacker, 2000).

The questionnaire and survey items were prepared to assess the respondents' perspectives of the interpreter's roles and tasks under five subheadings: communication issues, conveying emotions, neutrality and impartiality, addressing cultural differences, and managing power differentials. The survey included two parts, one consisting of multiple-

choice and short-answer items concerning demographic data and the other including 16 scale items related to the subheadings. The open-ended questionnaire consisted of 6 scenarios questioning the respondents' reactions to ethical dilemmas interpreters might face concerning the situations under the subheadings. One item was added to the end of the open-ended questionnaire to assess students' perceptions of the status and prospects of community interpreting.

Data were collected in the last two weeks of the fall semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. The 5-point Likert survey was administered in the first week, and the scenario questionnaire was administered in the second week. The data sheets were distributed and collected within a certain time interval during the relevant classes to ensure full and maximally objective participation. The rationale behind collecting the data at the end of the semester was to obtain an insight into the extent to which the course outcomes and objectives had been achieved. Fourteen of the 17 students enrolled in the course participated in the study. Three had already dropped out of university education for personal reasons.

All data were collected in writing and in English. Subsequently, the author entered the responses to the Likert scale survey into Google Forms and transcribed the reactions to the scenario questionnaire in an electronic copy file by assigning a number to each respondent. During transcription, correction of spelling and grammatical errors in the responses was kept to a minimum to avoid any distortion of meaning. The scale and scenario items were grouped under the five subheadings. Descriptive analysis techniques were applied to the data to obtain frequencies and percentages. The scenario responses were examined to yield recurrent expressions and patterns under the said subheadings, which were then compared with the relevant results of the Likert scale survey.

Ten of the 14 respondents, who were fourth-year students in the Department of Translation and Interpreting, were female. Two of them reported German as their working language in addition to English and Turkish. 50% of the 14 respondents indicated that they had experience in interpreting. Three of them reported interpreting experience in healthcare and 4 in the tourism and hotel sector, while 1 reported experience in the court setting, 1 in the conference setting, and 1 in a civil registry office. When asked about the number of interpreting assignments in these settings, more than 20 assignments were reported in the tourism and hotel sector, 3 in healthcare, and 2 in the civil registry office. The responses to these questions may indicate a high level of interest in the tourism and hotel sector and a lack of awareness of community interpreting, as the practise areas of the translation and interpreting profession in Türkiye.

When asked whether they would like to work as community interpreters after graduation, only 2 students responded "yes", while 11 (78.6%) were unsure. It can be argued that low earnings and unsatisfactory professional standards, which make community interpreting less attractive than other areas of translation and interpreting (Corsellis, 2008; Hale, 2015; Rudvin, 2015), might have played a role in the indecisiveness of the students who had concerns about their livelihoods after graduation.
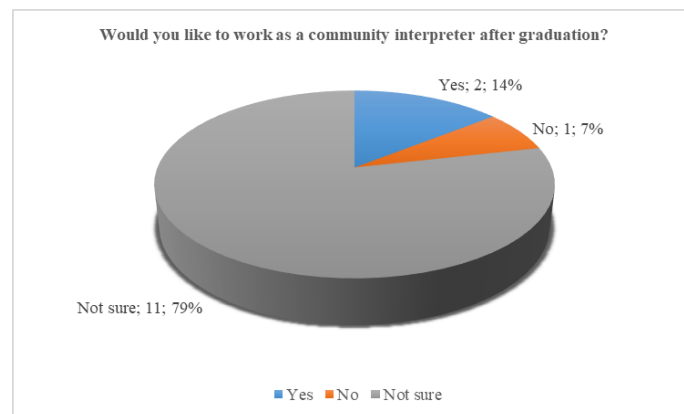

Figure 1. Desire to work as a community interpreter

As for the preferred working areas, 9 healthcare, 7 education, and 1 judiciary were reported. The fact that the judiciary was the least preferred working area demonstrated the students' perception of it as a formal field where stricter rules prevail, which they also expressed in their feedback following the scenarios they acted out during the classes.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents a discussion of the responses to the Likert scale survey and the scenario questionnaire in a comparative and complementary framework. Survey responses were graded on a scale ranging from 1 (Strongly

disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). One factor considered to have significantly influenced the students' responses was their lack of experience in authentic interpreting assignments. Almost no exposure to actual interaction processes most likely led the students to consider the given situations solely based on personal impressions, detached from relevant contexts, and thus contributed substantially to their ambivalent tendencies.

4.1. Communication Issues

The survey included items on various communication situations, such as speaking style, precision of statements, providing details, conveying offensive expressions, and paraphrasing. The respondents offered varying answers to these questions. There was no significant difference between the responses to the item on whether interpreters should adhere to their speaking style rather than that of the parties. Elements such as emphasis, emotion, intonation, and pauses were specified for the speaking style. Of the 14 respondents, 6 disagreed, 5 agreed, and 3 remained neutral. Similarly, no marked tendency was observed in the responses to the item "When interpreting, it is not necessary for the interpreter to give each and every detail as long as the meaning is conveyed". 6 respondents disagreed, while 7 agreed, and 1 was neutral. On the other hand, the responses to the item on whether interpreters' utterances have to be precise without any speculation were more revealing, with the vast majority (n=13, 93%) agreeing and 1 respondent (7%) being neutral. This finding may indicate that the traditional perception of interpreters as machines (Knapp-Potthoff & Knapp, 1986; Pöchhacker, 2004) was also shared by the students. The majority (n=9, 64.3%) also agreed with the item "It is the interpreter's duty to convey offensive words/expressions during the conversation", which may similarly be associated with the requirements of the conduit role attributed to interpreters.
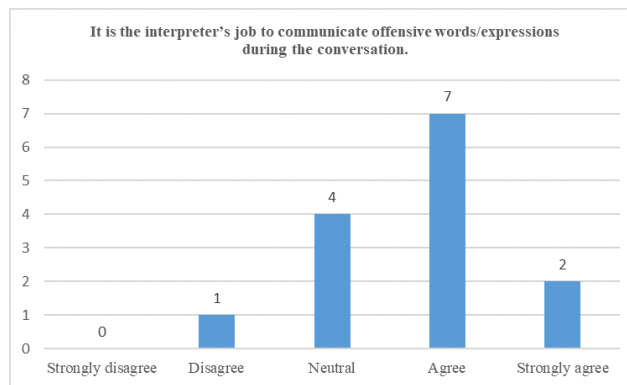

Figure 2. Offensive words and expressions

The last item about communication issues concerns whether interpreters can paraphrase utterances to convey meaning. Contrary to the aforementioned responses, the overwhelming majority (n=12, 85.7%) agreed that interpreters can paraphrase utterances. The unclear trend and discrepancy between the responses could be associated with the ambiguity created by the questioned situations in the minds of the students who had not had much experience in real-life interpreting settings.
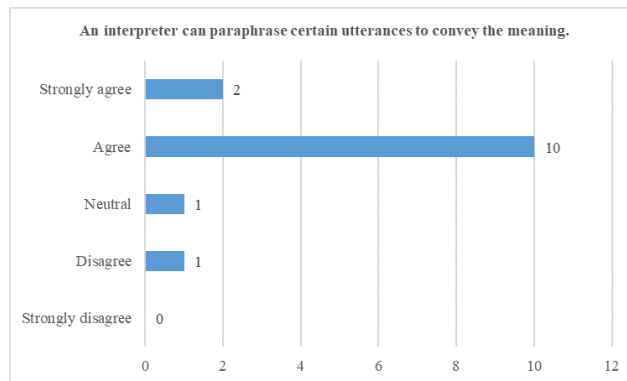

Figure 3. Paraphrasing

In the open-ended scenario questionnaire, there was one item explicitly related to communication issues. The item involved a scenario questioning the interpreter's attitude towards rectifying misinformation given by a migrant while the police officer was inquiring into a burglary incident. A tendency towards exposing the migrant was observed in the responses (8 responses out of 14). For instance, Respondent 10 gave a reaction along these lines, stating:

I would say "Translator wants to add something, the suspect gives false information about his identity." Realising such a man would harm the social order. [Respondent 10]

Apart from that, many responses pointed to the active role of an interpreter taking the initiative. Accordingly, the reactions included warning the migrant (5 responses), pushing the migrant to tell the truth (2 responses), and reminding both parties of the necessity of providing correct information (1 response). In this respect, one respondent noted:

I would warn her/him. I would push her to tell the truth about her identity. [Respondent 13]

In addition, 2 respondents mentioned that they would correct the information and transmit it to the other communicating party without taking any other actions. Along these lines, Respondent 7 stated:

I would give the right information to the police officer as soon as I understood the right situation. [Respondent 7]

4.2. Conveying Emotions

To get a glimpse of the students' perspectives on the issue of conveying emotions, the survey included the item "It is the interpreter's duty to convey the emotions of the parties". While the majority agreed (n=9, 64.2%), 4 respondents remained neutral, pointing to their ambivalence about whether interpreters should convey emotions or not.
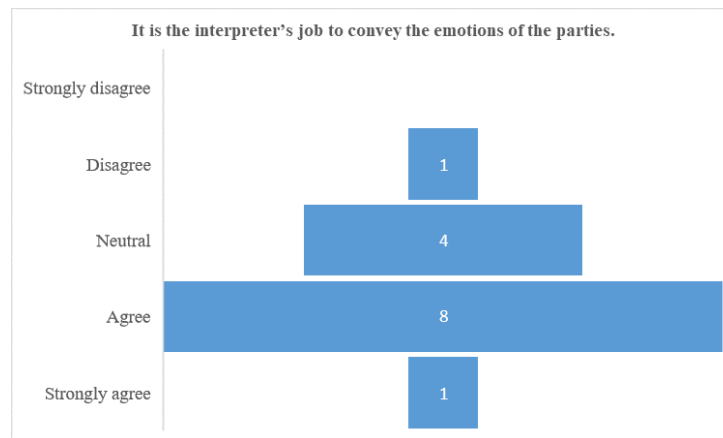

Figure 4. Conveying emotions

Similarly, most of the students' responses to the relevant scenario indicated their perception that interpreters cannot turn a blind eye to the parties' emotions. The scenario questioned the attitude of the interpreter who failed to understand and interpret the words of a crying asylum-seeker, a victim of war, during a psychiatric session. Many studies have shown that interpreters in psychology/psychotherapy sessions find it extremely difficult to interpret the stories of migrants who have had harrowing experiences (Crezee et al., 2013; Green et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2005; Polat Ulaş, 2022; Sultanić, 2021; Williams, 2005). Most of the reactions to the scenario indicate that respondents would be involved in some capacity in expressing and sharing emotions as understanding interpreters, as opposed to the mechanistic role envisioned for interpreters. In this respect, 10 responses included trying to calm the crying asylum-seeker, 2 responses included empathising with them, 2 responses included asking them if they needed time, 2 responses included asking the psychiatrist for a break, and 1 response included the interpreter's discretion to allow time for the asylum-seeker. In this regard, one respondent underlined the need for interpreters to build empathy with the vulnerable party, saying:

War is a universally saddening situation. As every human being an interpreter would feel for an asylum-seeker. It is very normal for them to cry and remember their bad memories. As interpreters, we shouldn't force anyone to speak before they are ready. We should be professional but also show empathy. [Respondent 14]

One respondent pointed to an even more active involvement in communication and stated:

I would ask him some questions in his mother tongue to keep him talking, but I would also try calming him down while he was answering my questions. [Respondent 11]

On the other hand, 4 responses indicated a stricter interpreter who, on the one hand, was understanding, but on the other hand, reminded the crying party that the interpreter was having difficulty understanding and asked them to speak clearly. In this respect, Respondent 5 said:

First, I would say to him/her "Please I can understand your sadness but I cannot understand your words efficiently, could you please feel relax and try to speak more clearly?" [Respondent 5]

4.3. Neutrality and Impartiality

Several items were included in the survey and the scenario questionnaire regarding the issue of neutrality and impartiality of interpreters, which has been refuted in many studies (Angelelli, 2004a; Barsky, 1996; Davidson, 2000; Hale, 2008; Hsieh, 2006; Jiang et al., 2014; Kadric, 2000; Leanza, 2005; Morris, 1995; Pöchhacker, 2000; Wadensjö, 1998). One item in the survey concerned developing close bonds with the party with whom the interpreter has more in common. While slightly more than half of the respondents (n=8, 57.1%) disagreed with the item, 3 (21.4%) were neutral and the other 3 (21.4%) agreed. Compared to widely held beliefs, most of the respondents most likely considered an interpreter's close ties with a communicating party as a stigmatising behaviour that could compromise impartiality.
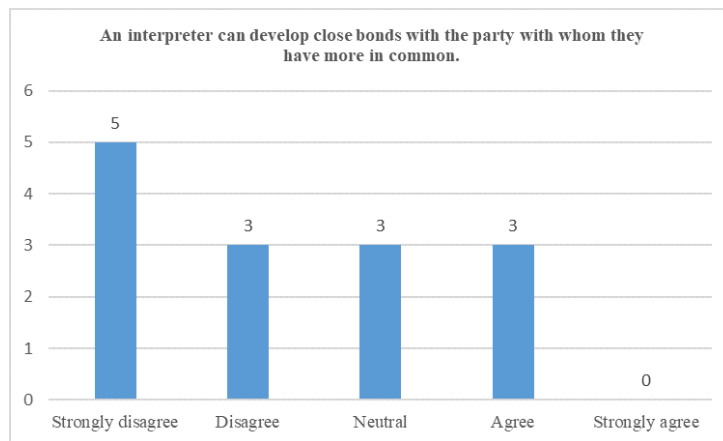

Figure 5. Developing close bonds

A similar item in the survey inquired whether an interpreter can establish a relationship of trust with a party with whom s/he has more in common. A similar but more pronounced tendency to disagree was observed in the responses to this item. Of the 14 respondents, 11 disagreed, 2 were neutral, and only 1 agreed.
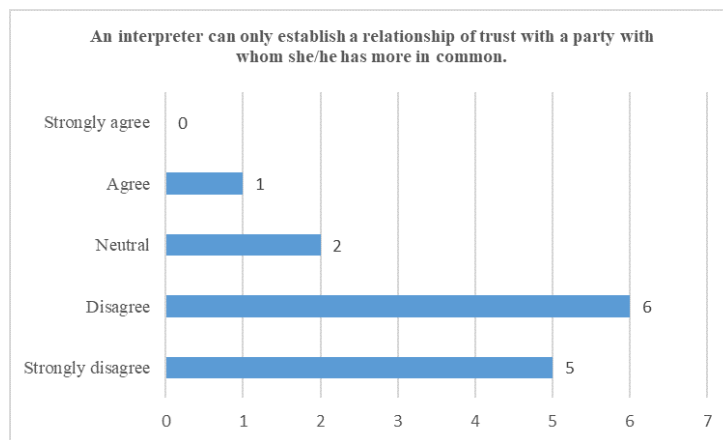

Figure 6. Establishing a relationship of trust

These results were comparable to reactions to a situation in the scenario questionnaire involving a refugee from the same background as the interpreter who built a relationship of trust with him/her. In the literature, migrants in need of interpreters were found to put their trust in an acquaintance or an interpreter with professional competence and skills,

depending on the way they positioned themselves in the host society (Edwards et al., 2006). In other studies, it was observed that they were able to establish a relationship of trust with mediators from the same ethnic background or those who took an interventionist attitude in communication processes (Filmer, 2019; Polat Ulaş, 2021a). In the relevant scenario item, the refugee asked the interpreter to withhold certain information. When asked how the interpreter would react without undermining the refugee's trust, most respondents (11) indicated that they would not conceal information. While 2 of the responses suggested a direct refusal of such a request, 9 included a reminder of responsibilities as an interpreter or some kind of explanation, such as the behaviour would be unethical or could cause the interpreter to lose his/her job. For instance, Respondent 6 mentioned:

I would tell him/her that it is not appropriate for my job and it would get me in trouble or even make me lose my job. [Respondent 6]

Respondent 7 expressed that he/she would provide a more detailed explanation to the refugee:

As an interpreter, it is my responsibility to ensure accurate and transparent communication. I want to support you, and that means being honest and open with shared information. We can work together to find the best approach. [Respondent 7]

Unlike the prevailing tendency, Respondent 8 implied that his/her reaction might depend on the likely consequences of withholding information, and Respondent 11 expressed that s/he would try to help the refugee:

I would probably try to help them if that "concealing" is not going to cause a big problem. [Respondent 11]

These responses point to an interpreter who could exercise discretion by weighing the contextual circumstances, rather than simply remaining within the boundaries of the prescribed role.

Another survey item on impartiality questioned whether the interpreter should remedy the situation if one party to the communication disrespects the other party. Most respondents (n=10, 71.4%) remained neutral, i.e., undecided between the role of a passive interpreter and an active interpreter intervening in the situation. Of the remaining 4 respondents, 2 agreed and the other 2 disagreed. A similar trend, albeit with fewer neutral responses, was found for another related survey item. To the item questioning whether it is the interpreter's duty to intervene if there is escalating tension between the parties during the interaction, 7 respondents (50%) remained neutral, whereas 3 (21.4%) disagreed and 4 (28.6%) agreed. A similar ambivalent tendency towards the impartiality of the interpreter was also revealed concerning another survey item. When asked whether it is impossible for the interpreter to remain completely impartial, half of the participants (n=7) disagreed, 3 were neutral and 4 agreed.
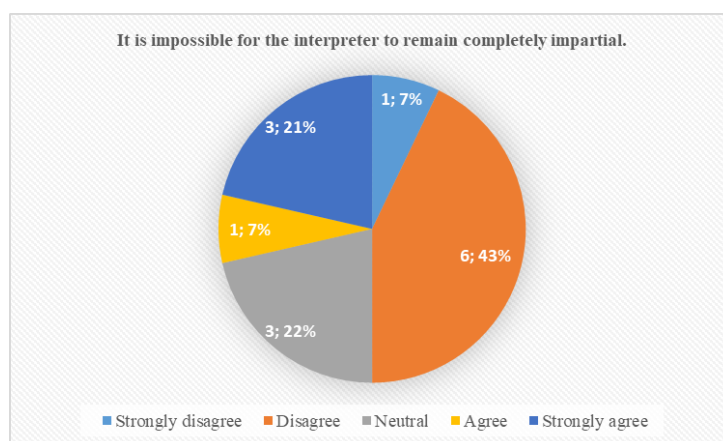

Figure 7. Remaining completely impartial

Similarly, no discernible trend was observed in the responses to a scenario item that might be relevant. To the item inquiring about the interpreter's reaction when a foreigner in a lawyer interview would make offensive statements contrary to the interpreter's worldview, 5 responses mentioned reacting to or warning the foreigner and 5 responses pointed to no reaction and objectivity of the interpreter. For instance, Respondent 11, mentioning that the interpreter should not involve his/her worldview in the job, stated:

I wouldn't do anything to warn him because my worldview has nothing to do with that situation. I would continue translating his words objectively and it would not change my attitude. [Respondent 11]

The reaction of Respondent 13, on the other hand, involved a stern warning to the foreigner:

In my opinion, no one can use offensive expressions in court. Of course, not everyone can have the same opinion, but one should adjust the tone of voice and not display offensive words. So, I simply warn the person. [Respondent 13]

That being said, most responses (9) made a clear point about directly conveying everything that was said, including offensive expressions. Only Respondent 4 stated that the meaning would be expressed indirectly, while Respondent 10 reported that the interpreter would tell the other party that the foreigner used offensive language without giving the exact wording. Aside from being a debated and questioned issue in community interpreting, the ambiguous tendencies concerning interpreter impartiality might partly stem from the students' lack of real-life experience with the situations investigated in the survey and questionnaire, leading them to respond simply on the basis of their overall impressions.

4.4. Addressing Cultural Differences

The key role of community interpreters in connecting refugees, asylum seekers, and other migrant groups from different backgrounds to services in host countries involves not only interpreting but also a form of cultural mediation due to the immediate relationship between culture and language (Pöchhacker, 2008). The linguistic and cultural knowledge of interpreters also places them in a privileged position vis-à-vis other parties in the relevant processes. Moreover, public service systems in host countries are closely tied to social and cultural conditions, inevitably imposing more responsibilities on interpreters than simple linguistic mediation. While the extent to which interpreters can act as a cultural mediator is a matter of debate (Hale, 2014), many studies have shown that they negotiate cultural differences between the parties to communication, acting as "cultural brokers", "cultural informants", or "intercultural agents" (Barsky, 1996; Kaufert & Koolage, 1984; Souza, 2016).

The students' responses in this study to the survey items about the interpreter's attitude towards cultural differences also revealed their perception of an interpreter as a cultural mediator. By way of illustration, when asked whether an interpreter should resolve conflicts arising from cultural differences between the parties during the interaction, the vast majority (n=9, 64.3%) agreed, whereas only 1 disagreed and 4 were neutral. In the responses to another item questioning whether an interpreter should provide guidance to the parties about cultural differences, the tendency towards an active mediator was more marked, with all the respondents (n=14) agreeing.
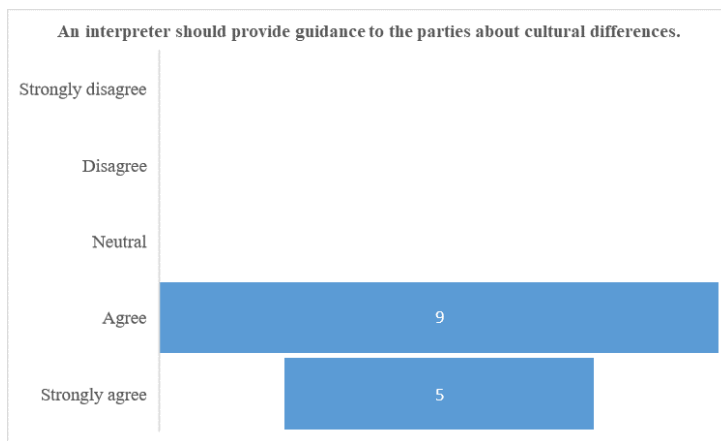

Figure 8. Guidance regarding cultural differences

A tendency for the interpreter to negotiate cultural differences and take necessary actions was also observed in the responses to a related scenario item, inquiring about the interpreter's attitude towards a migrant inadvertently making a blunder on a culturally different topic in a psychology session. In this respect, 12 responses involved various corrective actions of the interpreter, such as clearing up the likely misunderstanding for the other party (Respondents 1, 7), improving the situation by finding a solution (Respondent 2), informing the migrant about the inappropriateness of the situation (Respondents 3, 6), and asking the migrant to correct him/herself (Respondents 5, 13). The other responses involved a form of warning to the migrant. For instance, the attitude of Respondent 14 indicated a warning about the way of talking by also considering the migrant's educational background:

Not everybody must have the same mindset but everybody must respect each other. Taking migrants' educational background into consideration, I'd choose to interpret or not. However, I'd definitely give a warning about the way they talk and how they should respect this country and its people. [Respondent 14]

Two other responses expressed an understanding of and empathy with the migrant:

My attitude would be one of understanding and empathy. I would gently clarify any misunderstanding between the doctor and the patient. [Respondent 7]
It's a natural thing to do. All I will do is slightly warn the migrant about this topic. [Respondent 9]

A response not pointing to any form of attitude indicated a certain common sense, considering that the setting was a psychology session:

I would continue to interpret everything the migrant said because the migrant is not well psychologically. The doctor should hear everything. [Respondent 8]

Overall, the overwhelming majority of the responses demonstrated decisions by interpreters seeking to mediate cultural differences.

4.5. Managing Power Differentials

Community interpreting is a site of power imbalances involving a triadic communication process (Inghilleri, 2012; Mason & Ren, 2013; Rudvin, 2005). The communication process involves professionals who provide services in public institutions as representatives of host states and vulnerable groups of migrants who do not share the same language and culture with host communities. Interpreters who represent the language and culture of both groups thus seek to bridge the power differentials resulting from the disparity between the two groups. In this study, the general tendency concerning interpreter attitude in managing power imbalances was towards bridging gaps and taking a stance in favour of the non-dominant party. When asked whether it is the interpreter's duty to bridge communication gaps arising from the power differentials between the parties, the great majority of the respondents (n=11, 78.6%) agreed, while only 1 disagreed.

The item on interpreters' building trust between the parties, which may contribute to managing power differentials and which Angelelli (2004b) suggests among the five main components of the visible interpreter role, was agreed by most of the respondents (n=9, 64.3%). While 4 respondents were neutral, 1 disagreed. A larger majority of the respondents (n=12, 85.7%) indicated taking a stance in favour of the non-dominant party when asked whether an interpreter should ensure that the more dominant party does not exercise superiority over the weaker. The remaining 2 respondents were neutral.
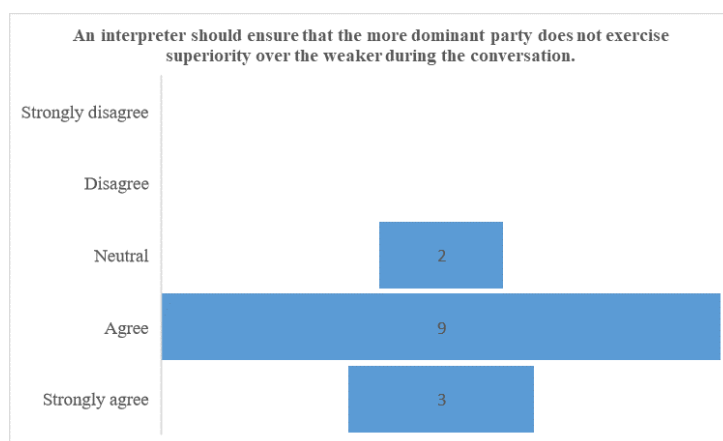

Figure 9. Preventing superiority over the weaker party

One scenario item that might be relevant questioned how the interpreter would react if s/he realised that a doctor was not fully providing services to the migrant by using discriminatory remarks about the group to which the migrant belonged. Most of the responses to this item pointed to an interpreter taking a tough stance against the party displaying discriminatory behaviour, i.e., the doctor, who is more powerful due to his/her social status. In this respect, 8 responses mentioned talking to the doctor about his/her improper conduct or reminding him/her of responsibilities. For instance, Respondent 10 noted:

I would try to talk about the topic with the doctor. I would say, "Your job is making people feel good and trying to give them the best treatment. You should not discriminate against people." [Respondent 10]

Hinting at a more elaborate conversation with the doctor, the reaction of Respondent 14 was as follows:

I'd be very upset seeing an educated person (doctor) being discriminatory. At the moment, I'd ask for a break and talk to the doctor about how difficult it would be for the migrant, and we as human beings must respect them very much. Not differentiate or discriminate anybody that is in need is every human being's responsibility. After this talk, I'd start the interpretation in a better and respective environment. [Respondent 14]

The reaction of Respondent 5 involved a conversation with the doctor, also highlighting the need for empathy:

I would say to the doctor "we should do our job without any discrimination because we would also be migrant in the future we never know what will happen even one minute later" then I would go on to translate everything. [Respondent 5]

Respondent 7 went further and expressed that he/she would directly advocate for the migrant:

I would immediately address the issue and advocate for the migrant's rights. There should be no discrimination in healthcare. [Respondent 7]

These responses indicate a proactive interpreter who would resist unfair behaviour. However, in real-life interpreter-mediated interviews, whether the respondents would be able to adopt such an attitude towards the party with the hierarchically strong position depends on various contextual and institutional factors as well as on the interpreter's professional and educational level.

Five respondents indicated that they would file a complaint about the doctor to a relevant department. Reporting cases of discrimination to higher units in the workplace is an action also recommended by the California Healthcare Interpreting Association (CHIA) (CHIA, 2002, p. 47). In this regard, Respondent 2 noted:

I would talk to the doctor at first and tell him/her that he/she cannot discriminate and that he/she has no such right to discrimination. I would complain about the doctor to the relevant unit. [Respondent 2]

On the other hand, 4 responses indicated an interpreter who took the initiative to resolve the situation in a more secure manner, without engaging with the doctor. Along these lines, Respondent 11 mentioned the following:

I would stay quiet about it since I am supposed to maintain formality in that place. BUT I would definitely take notes about the discriminatory remarks and after the session, I would guide the patient to the manager of that doctor and we would file a complaint together. [Respondent 11]

Two responses indicated simply informing the migrant of the situation and reminding him/her of their rights, without either contacting the doctor or reporting the situation to the higher authorities. In this respect, Respondent 12 stated:

I would inform the migrant about this issue. I would also give them information relating to their entitlements as much as I know. [Respondent 12]

The relevant responses above point to profiles of interpreters who would not overlook discrimination and would take the initiative, albeit to varying degrees, ranging from advocating for the migrant to reminding them of their rights.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

This study investigated community interpreting students' perceptions of the interpreter's role. The students were enrolled in the Translation and Interpreting Department of a state university. Fourteen fourth-year students were administered an open-ended questionnaire with scenarios and a Likert scale survey. The responses were examined under the subheadings of communication issues, conveying emotions, impartiality and neutrality, addressing cultural differences, and managing power differentials. Responses varied, pointing in some cases to a more mechanistic role perception, while in others to an active interpreter taking the initiative. The interpreters' likely interventions were particularly highlighted in the responses to the scenario questionnaire, which allowed for a greater range of insights and thus contributed to a deeper understanding of the role perspectives of the students.

Relating to communication issues, either no clear tendency was observed or responses pointing to the mechanistic conduit role (Knapp-Potthoff & Knapp, 1986; Pöchhacker, 2004) were found. In particular, the responses to the items about conveying offensive expressions and not giving room to speculation in utterances pointed to an interpreter remaining within the traditional role boundaries. Similarly, under the heading of impartiality and neutrality, there was an ambivalent trend in reactions to situations involving disrespectful behaviour of one party towards the other, escalating tension between the parties, and the use of statements contrary to the interpreter's worldview, while the tendency was towards remaining within the role boundaries for the situations involving establishing close ties and trust relationships and withholding information in favour of the migrant. It is recommended that relationships of trust, which have practical and ethical implications for the role of the community interpreter, be built within the framework of professionally regulated role boundaries (Edwards et al., 2006; Filmer, 2019). Otherwise, trust built in favour of one party might raise doubts about impartiality for the other party (Filmer, 2019).

On the other hand, when it came to conveying emotions, considered one of the distressing situations for interpreters (Crezee et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2005; Polat Ulaş, 2022; Williams, 2005), the responses indicated a proactive interpreter who would not ignore emotional states. Along similar lines, an effort to redress imbalances and a stance taken in favour of the non-dominant party were revealed in the responses under the subheading of managing power differentials. Reactions to the scenario item involving a doctor making discriminatory remarks against the migrant were characterised by a marked tendency towards an active or even advocate interpreter who reminded the doctor of their responsibilities. The contested advocacy role, which needs to be approached with caution (CHIA, 2002; Hale, 2008), was also found in other studies as an attitude adopted by interpreters in managing power imbalances between the communicating parties (Kaufert and Koolage, 1984). That being said, discrimination against minorities in the workplace is one of the factors leading to role conflicts and psychological distress for interpreters (Buendía, 2010, p. 11; Williams, 2005). Thus, it is recommended that interpreting students be trained to gain the necessary social skills that would enable them to handle such situations with common sense.

Concerning the issue of addressing cultural differences, the responses signalled the role of a cultural mediator who sought to eliminate misunderstandings. Whether interpreters can intervene in communication to clarify cultural issues is a contested issue, especially in court interpreting (Hale, 2014). In addition, for healthcare interpreting, it is highlighted that cultural change brought by globalisation complicates intercultural communication for interpreters, which necessitates the questioning of the cultural mediation role (Ra, 2018, p. 270). In this respect, Wadensjö (1995, p. 127) stresses that interpreters should go beyond the conduit role and take responsibility in communication as participants contributing to the construction of meaning. For this purpose, it is recommended to train interpreting students in such a way as to provide them not only with linguistic skills but also with social and interactive skills.

Key findings suggest that the students perceived the community interpreter as an actor moving beyond the boundaries of the mechanistic role in particular situations that may require interpreters' intervention, i.e., in dealing with emotional states, addressing cultural differences, and redressing power imbalances. The findings expand upon previous studies' findings demonstrating that interpreters cannot exhibit standard behaviours or assume static roles under all circumstances in complex social communication processes (Angelelli, 2004b; Barsky, 1996; Bot, 2003; Bulut & Kurultay, 2001; Davidson, 2000; Hale, 2008; Hsieh, 2006; Jiang et al., 2014; Leanza, 2005; Niska, 1995; Pöchhacker, 2000; Resera et al., 2015; Souza, 2016). These findings may have significant implications for the design of the curricula of community interpreting courses offered at the academic level.

Against these insights, this study has certain limitations that might have affected the role perceptions of the community interpreting students. The fact that the students had almost no experience in interpreter-mediated interviews in real-life social and institutional settings might have distorted their reactions to the survey and questionnaire items. Nevertheless, the responses given within the scope of this study show that students developed an awareness of the role of community interpreters as active participants in communication processes, contrary to the unachievable mechanistic role envisaged for interpreters. The discussions on ethical guidelines and interpreter roles in the relevant classes as well as the role-plays and simulations concerning various interpreting scenarios might have contributed to the development of such awareness.

Lastly, the students' perspectives on the status of community interpreting and its prospects, which might be of relevance to professionalisation and training issues in community interpreting, are worth mentioning. Almost all of the students expressed the increasing importance of community interpreting due to global developments, such as wars and disasters, and the vital role of community interpreters in intercultural communication. Furthermore, they touched upon the demanding and complex skills required of interpreters in bringing people from different cultures together, ensuring inclusivity, and assisting vulnerable groups. On the other hand, 2 students mentioned the risk that artificial intelligence poses to community interpreting, stating that community interpreters could be replaced by it in the foreseeable future. Four students mentioned a lack of recognition and supervising institutions, poor working conditions, and low payment and financial support, which are considered to be the main obstacles to the professionalisation of community interpreting (Corsellis, 2008; Hale, 2015; Mikkelson, 1999; Rudvin, 2015).

Recent wars, crises, and disasters and the ensuing growth of the migrant and refugee population in Türkiye have revealed the importance of being prepared in every sense, including communication and language services. This requires raising the status and standards of community interpreting and designing effective academic programmes to train interpreters for public service settings. The insights gained from this study point to the importance of understanding the role of the community interpreter by prospective interpreters who are likely to provide services in these settings. In this respect, it is recommended to train interpreters who become aware of their role as a "humanitarian service provider" (Bahadır, 2011, p. 264) and who can define their roles rather than conforming to prescribed role definitions (Inghilleri, 2005, p. 52). This will entail raising interpreters with common sense who can reflect on ethical issues,

exercise discretion when necessary, and become accountable for the decisions they make (Baker-Shenk, 1991; Skaaden, 2019; Wadensjö, 1995). As other studies have also shown (Özkaya Marangoz & Kumlu, 2023; Tian et al., 2022), the professional awareness of prospective interpreters will be raised by curricula designed to provide them with linguistic competence and cognitive skills, psychological agility, cross-cultural, interpersonal, and social skills, knowledge of the field in which the service is provided, and the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in real-life conditions.

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