This is a reviewed articel

Impoliteness – a challenge to interpreters' professionalism

Tatjana Radanovic Felberg

Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences

Department of International Studies and Interpreting

tatjana-radanovic.felberg@hioa.no

Abstract

This article examines interpreters' perceptions of impoliteness in interpreter-mediated interactions in public sector settings in Norway. The analysis is based on a survey conducted in June 2014, involving 28 interpreters from/to Bosnian/Croatian/ Montenegrin/Serbian and Norwegian. The analytical method is based on the theory of impoliteness and the rapport management model. The study has a discursive, data-driven and bottom-up approach.

The study is motivated by challenges described by interpreting students who already work as interpreters in the public sector in Norway. These students repeatedly reported to their teachers two types of challenges with "impoliteness". The first challenge concerns their own experiences with impoliteness from public service users, public service employees, or both. The other type of challenge concerns the very act of interpreting impoliteness. Even though the Guidelines for best practices in interpreting, which define the interpreter's role and function, address these issues indirectly, interpreters express a need for more specific knowledge and guidance. As no research has been conducted on impoliteness in interpreter-mediated dialogues in the public sector in Norway, a pilot project was set up in order to describe and analyze the phenomenon, as seen from interpreters' points of view. This article concentrates on the following research questions: How widespread is impoliteness in interpreter-mediated interaction in public sector settings, according to interpreters?, How do interpreters define and exemplify impoliteness? and What strategies do interpreters use for interpreting impoliteness?

The findings suggest that impoliteness in the public sector is more widespread than the author expected. The notion of "conflictive talk" playing a central role in various discourses is supported by interpreters' examples of impoliteness in interpreter-mediated encounters. Interpreters' examples indicate that impoliteness may create ambiguity on different levels and that being able to cope with it is crucial for doing a good job as an interpreter. Impoliteness is more than swearwords. It is context dependent – whether something is impolite depends on a participant's evaluation of the situation. Impoliteness is experienced in a number of ways, and the consequences for interpreters of not managing impoliteness range from hurt feelings to a halt in communication. Interpreters use different interpreting strategies while interpreting impoliteness – from interpreting what is being said, to reporting that impolite language is being uttered, to ignoring impoliteness altogether. These strategies can have a direct influence on the outcome of interpreter-mediated institutional dialogues. Insight into interpreters' as well as the other communication participants' concerns leads to the next step: developing and systemizing strategies that can help them cope better with these work-related challenges.

Introduction

Interpreters work in the public sector in Norway in various settings, including courts, asylum hearings, social services, police interviews, jails, hospitals and schools. All these settings involve institutional encounters in which communication participants may have competing expectations, goals, and values that can lead to discordant interactions. Interpreting students from Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences have repeatedly reported to their teachers about difficulties with handling discordant interactions. These interpreting students already work as interpreters in the public sector, and this article refers to them as interpreters. More specifically, these interpreters identified 'impoliteness' as a double challenge for their professionalism. On one hand, they experience impoliteness from public service users and/or public service employees. On the other hand, they are also concerned with the very act of interpreting of impolite speech. These concerns leave interpreters wondering about how they should respond when faced with impoliteness and how they should interpret impolite speech.

The main principles of the interpreters' profession in Norway, which define the interpreter's role and function, are set forth in the Retningslinjer for god tolkeskikk (1997) (*Guidelines for best practices in interpreting)*. These principles include fidelity, that is, being true to the message that is being interpreted, and impartiality, that is, not taking sides in the interaction. These guidelines tell interpreters to interpret everything that is being said, in the way it is being said. Consequently, the answer to the question of how to interpret impolite speech should be obvious. However, this seems not to be case, as this study will show.

On the other side, public service employees are obliged to follow the Ethical Guidelines for Public Service, which explicitly address politeness in paragraph 1.1. by stating that "each and every public official shall be considerate, friendly, polite, correct, and accommodating to the public in written and verbal communication". However, as interpreters exemplify, interpreter-users, be they public service employees or public service users, behave impolitely from time to time. What is understood as impoliteness differs across communication participants and contexts.

Motivated by interpreters' experiences, as briefly sketched above, a project was set up in order to explore this phenomenon. An overarching goal of the project is the practical application of this study: developing and systemizing strategies that can help both interpreters and interpreter-users cope better with these challenges.

This article describes the first step in the project and will concentrate on the following research questions:

     a) How widespread is impoliteness in interpreter-mediated interaction in public sector settings, according to interpreters?

     b) How do interpreters define and exemplify impoliteness?

     c) What strategies do interpreters use for interpreting impoliteness?

The study is discursive, bottom-up and data driven. The aim is to describe and analyze interpreters' retrospective evaluations of interactions. This is done by determining what interpreters understand as impoliteness and by eliciting relevant examples and anecdotes.

The study is based on an understanding of interpreting as interaction (Wadensjö 1998). It introduces impoliteness theory (Bousfield, 2008; Bousfield & Locher, 2008; Culpeper, 2011) and rapport management framework (Spencer-Oatey, 2002, 2007, 2013 [2000]) as tools for understanding the data. These approaches are based on a dialogical understanding of communication as a joint enterprise of all communication participants.

Existing international research on impoliteness has investigated different contexts ranging from private to institutional impoliteness (Culpeper 2011). No study focuses exclusively on impoliteness in interpreter-mediated interaction in the public sector. However, there are studies of the connection between face issues and interpreting; for example, how face-threatening acts are modified during translation (Mason & Stewart 2001) and how politeness plays a role in forming witnesses' impressions (Berk-Seligson 2002). Introducing impoliteness theory in research on interpreting provides a language to use in the negotiation of what is understood as impoliteness in a given context and contributes to shedding new light on interpreting in public service settings.

The article is organized as follows. First, the article presents more detail about the theoretical and methodological approaches used in the study. Second, the data is described. The data is taken from an online survey involving 28 interpreters interpreting from/to Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian (BCMS) and Norwegian, conducted in June 2014. Third, the article presents the findings in three parts, each addressing one research question. The findings suggest that impoliteness in the public sector is more widespread than expected. Interpreters' examples support the notion of 'conflictive talk' playing a central role in various discourses (Culpeper, Bousfield, & Wichmann 2003: 1546) and thus include interpreter-mediated encounters as well. Impoliteness is expresses in a number of verbal and nonverbal ways and it is connected not only to conventional impolite speech, such as swearing, but also to implied impoliteness. Further, impoliteness has implication for both face and rights issues. The discussion is partially interwoven in the results section (in order to contextualize examples), and partially placed under a separate heading. The article goes on to discuss interconnections between directionality (who is impolite to whom) and impoliteness, and points out emerging patterns. The article finishes with concluding remarks.

Theoretical and methodological approach

Interpreter-mediated interaction is a special kind of interpersonal interaction in which two or more persons communicate through a third person. I follow Wadensjö (1998) in understanding interpreting as interaction and interpreter-mediated dialogues as *pas de trois*. That means that all participants in the interaction contribute to meaning making, and can influence interaction and consequently the results of that interaction. In the public sector the results of interaction often include actions like getting the right or wrong medicine, fair or unfair trial or being granted or denied asylum. A consequence of understanding interpreting as interaction is that interpreters become more than mere translation machines. They are both interpreting and coordinating interaction (Wadensjö 1998:109). This understanding of interpreting is based on the dialogical model of language in contrast to the monological model of language (Wadensjö 1998: 7-8).

Interpreters interpret different kinds of interactions, both harmonious and discordant. Harmonious interpersonal interactions were the main object of interest of the classic politeness theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). This study, conducted within the field of sociopragmatics, inspired a large body of research. Nonetheless, the study was criticized for "ignoring the lay person's conception of politeness, inadequate conception of 'face' across diverse cultures, inadequate model of communication, focus on verbal and

almost exclusion of non-verbal aspects and not having a theory of context." (Bousfield & Locher 2008:18). While impoliteness was given a minor place in these studies, it was not adequately described and analyzed, according to Culpeper (2011:6). One of the reasons given according to Bousfield & Locher (2008) was its alleged peripheral position in human relations. However, the emerging body of research demonstrates that impoliteness is "commonplace in a variety of different discourses" and that it can be "strategic, systematic and sophisticated" (Culpeper 2011:6).

After a period of trying to study impoliteness by merely reversing conceptual framework developed in politeness theory (for example Culpeper 1996), the focus has been broadened by inclusion of, for example, relational frameworks (Arundale 2006, 2010; Locher & Wats 2005), identity theory (Blitvich 2009), context (Bousfield & Locher 2008), and culture (Mills 2009).

Research on impoliteness has been concentrated on dyadic discourse. The need for more research in polylogal discourse (consisting of three or more participants in interaction) was already pointed out by Dobs & Garces-Conejos Blitvich (2013). In addition, I submit that there is a need for more research about impoliteness in interpreter-mediated encounters.

How is impoliteness defined in literature? There is no agreement in literature about a single definition of the phenomenon (for an overview of various definitions see Culpeper 2011:20, 21). However, Culpeper points to two common elements in almost all definitions: notions of 'face' and intentionality. The notion of face, adopted from Goffman (1967) is about our preferred self-image. Wadensjö (1998: 177) also refers to Goffman when she discusses interpreters' "face-work" as a measure used in order to counteract the risk of hurting others. The understanding of face used in this article will be further elaborated in the following paragraphs in connection with rapport management framework. The notion of intentionality is a complex one as it involves individuals' perceptions. If one perceives speech or behavior as intentionally impolite, but it was not intended as impolite by the actor, can we nonetheless consider it as impolite? Would one be less offended if the actor intended no impoliteness? Or would one perhaps not be offended at all?

Other elements in definitions of "impoliteness" that Culpeper explored include social norms, expectations and emotional aspect (Culpeper 2011: 21). Impoliteness is a notion constructed by reference to individuals' subjective and normative expectations of appropriate behavior for a given situation. Specific expectations for communicative situations (e.g., formality/informality, closeness/distance, and professionalism/friendship) can play a significant role in public service settings as well. Research suggests that there is cross-cultural variation in impoliteness (Culpeper 2011: 43). This point is important for interpreter-mediated interaction as interpreting is by definition cross-cultural. There are several models for categorizing impoliteness (Bousfield (2008: 99-143); Culpeper 2011: 113-194. In this article I will use Culpeper's broad categorization into conventionalized (insults) and non-conventionalized (implicational) impoliteness.

The above-mentioned definitions belong to second order of investigations of impoliteness (impoliteness2), which investigates and develops theoretical concepts. By contrast, the first order of investigations (impoliteness1) consists of evaluations of impoliteness by lay persons, i.e., the social actors. Even though I base my theoretical understanding on definitions from second order of impoliteness, this article focuses on impolitness1, i.e., how interpreters themselves perceive and evaluate impoliteness in their work. In other words, I follow a discursive approach to impoliteness, giving communication participants' interpretations the principal position in the analysis (Arundale 2006: 209). The consequence of impoliteness being constructed by communication participants in a particular context is difficulty predicting what may be understood as impoliteness outside that context. I, as a

researcher, do not judge what is impolite, but rather what kind of "discursive struggle interactants engage in" (Locher & Wats 2005: 9). Thus, in this article I will use the following definition as a working definition: "Impoliteness is behaviour that is face-aggravating in a particular context." (Bousfield & Locher 2008:3)

How does impoliteness fit into a larger system of interpersonal interactions? One of the frameworks that attempts to answer this question is the rapport management framework developed by Spencer-Oatey (2002, 2007, 2013 [2000]) and extended by Culpeper (2011: 26–47). Rapport refers to "people's subjective perceptions of (dis)harmony, smoothness-turbulence and warmth-antagonism in interpersonal relations" (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009: 102), whereas rapport management concerns "the management of interpersonal relations: the use of language to promote, maintain or threaten harmonious social relations" (Spencer-Oatey 2013 [2000]: 3). The framework accommodates both impoliteness and politeness, and includes categories of face, equity rights, and association rights. Face is understood as relational and interactive rather than static. Face issues are connected to one's sense of identity or self-concept: "self as an individual (individual identity), self as a group member (group or collective identity) and self in relationship with others (relational identity)" (Spencer-Oatey 2013 [2000]: 14). Individual identity or quality face and relational or social identity face are particularly useful categories for this study, as will be shown later.

Quality face exists when

> We have a fundamental desire for people to evaluate us positively in terms of our personal qualities; e.g. our competence, abilities, appearance etc. *Quality face* is concerned with the value that we effectively claim for ourselves in terms of such personal qualities as these, and so is closely associated with our sense of personal self-esteem (Spencer-Oatey 2002: 540).

This study assumes that all communication participants want to be evaluated positively: interpreters for interpreting well, public service employees for doing their job well, and public service users for deserving to get good service.

Social identity face exists when

> We have a fundamental desire for people to acknowledge and uphold our social identities or roles, e.g. as group leader, valued customer, close friend. *Social identity face* is concerned with the value that we effectively claim for ourselves in terms of social or group roles, and is closely associated with our sense of public worth (Spencer-Oatey 2002: 540).

Interpreters as members of a profession-in-making face some challenges regarding their social identity that public service employees such as doctors and lawyers do not. For example, conflicting understandings of the interpreter's role by interpreter-users, lack of necessary education in interpreting, and unfavorable working conditions can have a negative influence on interpreters' "sense of public worth." In addition, some interpreters interpret for close-knit language groups that they themselves belong to; these interpreters are challenged by balancing between different social identities—for example, a friend/compatriot vs. a professional interpreter.

Spencer-Oatey divides sociality rights into equity rights and association rights. Equity rights are about people's "fundamental belief that they are entitled to personal consideration from others and to be treated fairly" (Spencer-Oatey 2005: 100), and association rights are when "people have a fundamental belief that they are entitled to an association with others that is in keeping with the type of relationship that they have with them" (Spencer-Oatey 2005: 100). Both are important in institutional interaction. Culpeper (2011) added two minor categories to Spencer-Oatey's framework: taboo and physical self. Taboo words include swearwords with a strong negative affective meaning for achieving different aims; for example, message intensity (Culpeper 2011: 141). Taboo varies across cultures and contexts. Culpeper's second category is physical self—being frightened for one's own wellbeing (2011: 42). Both categories are found in the data analyzed. This extended framework is used as a methodological tool for identifying impoliteness as a possible source "threatening harmonious social relations."

Data

Researchers of both impoliteness and interpreting in public sector use a great range of data, including naturally occurring data, data from different corpora, and reflections elicited from respondents. As this study focuses on impoliteness1, I chose to use a survey as a first step to collect interpreters' definitions of impoliteness.

This article reports on data gathered through an online questionnaire made in LimeSurvey involving Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian (BCMS) interpreters. Participants were recruited through the Norwegian National Register of Interpreters (NRI)[1]. Thirty-six registered interpreters were sent the invitation email and the explanatory statement in BCMS. Survey data were collected from 1. - 30. June 2014. Twenty-eight responses were received, giving a rather high response rate of 77% (28/36).

Interpreters participated in the study on a voluntary basis. The questionnaire was anonymized and participants consented to the research.

The survey design incorporated yes/no and open-ended questions to elicit subjective responses. It was divided into three sections: (1) basic information about the interpreter; (2) the interpreter's experience with impoliteness; and (3) interpreter's strategies for interpreting impoliteness. The questionnaire had a total of thirteen questions[2], all written in BCMS. The respondents answered in BCMS, Norwegian, or a mixture of these languages. The respondents' answers were translated into English by the author.

The sample included 18 female (64%) and 10 male (36%) respondents, a proportion that reflects the gender distribution of interpreters in this language group generally. The majority of respondents (78%) have more than 10 years of experience interpreting in the public sector in Norway.

The results were analyzed by conducting a content analysis of interpreters' comments. Each comment was thoroughly read and classified based on the rapport management framework.

---

1 www.tolkeportalen.no
2 For the list of the questions, see Appendix 1.

Findings

How widespread is impoliteness?

Thirty-nine percent (11) of the interpreters responded that they experienced impoliteness from a public sector employee, 32% (9) had not had any such experience, and 29% (8) did not answer.

Fifty percent (14) of the respondents experienced impoliteness by public sector users, 18% (5) had experienced no impoliteness by public sector users, and 32% (9) did not answer.

As mentioned earlier, employees in the public sector are obliged to follow ethical guidelines that explicitly require them to be polite (among other things). This could be interpreted as no or low tolerance for impoliteness. Based on this assumption, the findings suggest widespread lack of compliance with the guidelines' expectations regarding impoliteness. Furthermore, the findings suggest that interpreters experience impoliteness more often from public service users than from public service employees. However, the analyzed sample is small and results will be checked with a higher number of respondents as the project continues.

I would also argue that examples of impoliteness, being closely connected to emotions, are so striking that they may produce a distorted picture of their frequency. Impoliteness leaves a lasting impression through anecdotes that spread easily and tend to be told and retold for a long period of time. While these anecdotes may exaggerate the frequency with which impoliteness occurs, they nonetheless call attention to aspects of interpersonal interactions that can help us analyze discordant interactions.

How do interpreters define impoliteness?

Interpreters' experiences with impoliteness is associated with their expectations of what constitutes normal behavior in institutional dialogues; that is, their own definitions of the phenomenon. When asked to define impoliteness, the interpreters relate it to notions of intentionality, emotions, power, and norms in a society. These notions overlap with the categories in impolitenes2 definitions, as presented in the beginning of this article. The following paragraphs present examples of each of these categories.

Several respondents addressed intentionality. Excerpts (1) and (2) show that understandings of intentionality diverge. Interpreter (1) defined impoliteness as obvious and intentional, whereas for the other (2) the context was the important variable for deciding whether unintentional impoliteness may also be categorized as impoliteness. Diverging definitions may influence interaction in different ways.

(1)   In the context of interpreting I think of impoliteness as obvious and intentional . . .

(2)   The question is whether a person is impolite if he does not intend to be. It depends on the context.

Emotions are an important issue for several respondents. Their definitions connect emotions of offended dignity (example 3), unease (4), being underestimated (5), and disgust or shame (6) to impoliteness. All of these can be related to face issues; that is, attacks on an interpreter's self-esteem. However, they address different emotions.

(3)   Impoliteness can be either verbal or nonverbal, but it always affects human dignity.

(4)   Impoliteness is verbal and/or nonverbal communication that is not generally accepted and that makes the interlocutor uneasy.

(5)   Impoliteness is verbal or nonverbal arrogance, not respecting the code of conduct, or underestimating the interlocutor.

(6)   Impoliteness is a verbal expression of offence or something that evokes unease, disgust, or shame.

Two respondents focused on power-related issues when explaining impoliteness. The first (7) attributes impoliteness to a need to express superiority, and the second (8) explains it as a defense mechanism.

(7)   Impoliteness derives from impudence and cynicism, often with a need to show superiority.

(8)   Impoliteness is often used as a defense mechanism by the person being interpreted to, especially if it concerns an offense or misdemeanor, when one wants to transfer the focus from the lawbreaker to the interpreter.

Both respondents indirectly addressed power balance in interpreter-mediated dialogues. Interpreter-users try to assert a position of power and defend their own interests either by asserting superiority or by adopting defensive behaviour. Sometimes they do so at the expense of the interpreter, as in (8), 'when one wants to transfer the focus from the lawbreaker to the interpreter.' This suggests that power is dynamic and constructed mutually by the persons participating in the communication.

Further, respondents connect impoliteness with accepted norms of communication, codes of conduct, and standard norms in a society (5 and 9). Evaluating impoliteness with reference to accepted rules in a society defines impoliteness in terms of breaches of social norms or, in Spencer-Oatey's terms, rights issues.

(9)   Impoliteness consists of unacceptable utterances and behaviors that are not in harmony with accepted standard norms in a society.

Interpreters included various elements in their definitions of impoliteness. Some interpreters included use of swearwords, while others defined impoliteness by reference to its consequences. Still others contrasted impoliteness with "normal" behavior. In other words, the interpreters' definitions of impoliteness included elements of both face and rights issues, as well as taboo and physical self categories mentioned in the analytical model presented above. Most respondents emphasized nonverbal impoliteness (for example 3, 4, and 5). Some respondents considered that disinterest, or impatience with interlocutors also constituted a form of impoliteness. Overall, the definitions are subjective, with different interpreters focusing on different elements: while one might emphasize swearing as an element of impatience, another might emphasize intentionality. Interpreters' definitions demonstrate a wide range of understandings of impoliteness, which probably results in different strategies for coping with the phenomenon.

Interpreters' examples of impoliteness

Interpreters gave a number of examples of impoliteness that they had experienced from public service employees and public service users. In addition, without being asked, they gave examples of witnessing impoliteness between the two parties. All interpreting is, in a way, "witnessing". However, this type of "witnessing" requires no personal action from interpreters. On the other hand, witnessing involves a notion of responding (Dobs & Blitvich 2013). Should interpreters respond to impoliteness between the parties they are interpreting for? There is little research on witness responding to impoliteness (Dobs & Blitvich 2013) and no research on interpreters responding to impoliteness.

The examples of impoliteness that interpreters gave can be connected to face issues, rights issues, taboo and physical self. Some examples are not clear-cut as they combine several of these issues. The findings suggest a slight prevalence of examples that address face issues and taboo than rights issues. Examples for each category are given below.

Face issues

Several respondents stated that interpreter-users refer to the interpreter as "a necessary evil". The respondent in example (10) also stated that interpreter-user had the right to interrupt the interpreter, to ask the interpreter to step out of his role, and to "evaluate" the public service users. This example can be interpreted as an attack on the interpreter's social identity face. It seems that interpreter-users and interpreters have competing understandings of interpreter's function.

(10) Sometimes the interpreter-users showed that they viewed the interpreter as a necessary evil. They did not allow me to interpret everything, and they stopped me in a harsh manner when I tried to point out something that was not the interpreter's role or responsibility. There were instances of insinuations and open cynicism. Sometimes they tried to make me "evaluate" a user whose mother tongue was not Norwegian.

Similarly negative attitudes towards interpreters are expressed in example (11) when a medical doctor becomes angry when an interpreter is trying to explain his role before the start of a dialogue.

(11) A typical situation: The doctor gets angry when the interpreter explains his role, he interrupts and in an impatient/condescending manner says: "We have already heard this several times."

There are two salient points in this example. One is the interpreter's evaluation of the doctor's behavior as "impatient/condescending", which points out the importance of nonverbal communication. Not only what is said, but also how it is said, may be understood as impolite. The statement, "We have already heard this several times" can be uttered in different ways. Here, the interpreter understands it as a face attack because interpreter's competence is questioned. The other point is the doctor's use of the pronoun *we*. It is ambiguous as it is not clear who "*we*" are. It could include all three communication participants, or the doctor and the patient, or the doctor and the interpreter. Nevertheless, the implication of this statement is that the interpreter is making a mistake in providing information about his role/function. However, interpreters registered with the NRI are encouraged to start their assignments by explaining the interpreter's function in both languages. This advice is based on the *Guidelines for best practices in interpreting*, and the reasoning is that interpreter-users have differing understandings of the interpreter's role.

Several interpreters categorized questions posed to them before an assignment about their ethnic, religious, or political background as impolite. One respondent described these questions as unprofessional and unimportant for interpreting (12) while another (13) viewed a question about ethnicity as a trust issue associated with the personal interests of an interpreter-user.

(12) Unprofessional questions of a personal nature directed to the interpreter before interpreting, and which have no importance to interpreting. For example, what my nationality is, whether I am a believer, whether I eat pork, etc.

(13) Frequently my ethnicity is used to portray me as a person ill-suited for interpreting (defining in advance my prejudice as an interpreter based on my name or my husband's   name). I have been labeled with different ethnicities depending on the interest of the person for whom I am interpreting.

These respondents define themselves fundamentally as professionals and view interpreter-users' questions that challenge that concept as impolite. Nonetheless, ethnicity was one of the main elements that caused users to distrust interpreters working in the aftermath of the war in the former Yugoslavia (Felberg 2013; Kelly & Baker 2013:130). Personal trust is repeatedly emphasized as more important than professional trust. Interpreter-users sometimes abuse this situation, and try to gain some advantage by requesting an interpreter of a different ethnicity or religion, as described in example (13).

Rights issues

The data present fewer examples relating to rights issues than with face issues. Example (14) describes unfair treatment of a public service user as seen from the interpreter's point of view. In that example, a mother sought advice from a pediatrician on treating her children, and the pediatrician wanted the mother to consider leaving Norway. When the mother did not answer the pediatrician's question directly, the pediatrician used the Norwegian equivalent of "fu***** hell", possibly to emphasize his irritation and in a way "blame" the interpreter for not managing to convey the message properly. It seems that the pediatrician's irritation with the mother spilled over to the interpreter, highlighted and intensified by use of the swearword. The interpreter's reaction to the pediatrician's verbal behavior resulted in a communication breakdown, as the interpreter withdrew from the assignment.

(14) An uncomfortable situation in which a pediatrician tried to get a Bosnian mother to understand that she did not stand a chance of staying in Norway, that her application for protection would ultimately be rejected, while she was merely asking for help in managing two hyperactive boys. The doctor was irritated, totally ignored the mother, and addressed the interpreter: "Fu***** hell, try to get her to understand that she has to prepare herself to leave Norway. . . !" This lasted until the interpreter withdrew from his role. . . .

In example (15) the public service user was denied the right to speak because the public service employee interrupted and did not let the interpreter finish. This seems to be an example of the employee showing a lack of personal consideration, exercising power over both the public service user and the interpreter: the public service user was not allowed to speak and the interpreter was not allowed to do his job. The employee ordered participants to sit down and be quiet, and left them by claiming a break; this may have been a way of exercising power and denying interlocutors their rights of association.

(15) Orders and indifference toward interlocutors' needs. The employees interrupted the interpreter in the middle of a sentence because the employee was not interested in listening to the end. He ignored the interpreter, who was insisting on finishing what she has started to interpret:

Interpreter: "The child needs milk and I need . . ."

Public service employee: "Yes, yes, you have to sit quietly and wait now. I have a break now. Interpreter, you can sit there and wait."

Taboo

The majority of answers to the question about situations in which interpreters experience impoliteness by public service users (BCMS speakers) are about conventionalized impoliteness (taboo, abusive, or profane language; Bousfield 2008: 110; Culpeper 2011: 113). This type of impoliteness corresponds to Culpeper's taboo category in rapport management model.

Swearwords can have different functions in different contexts and are often a sign of power or powerlessness (Ljung 1987). In example (16) a witness made his message, "do not lie", more forceful by adding a swearword, possibly intending to threaten the witness. Respondents also gave examples of swearwords used to react to unfavorable decisions as interpreted (example (17)), and to show lack of respect (example (18)).

(16) To the witness: Fu** your mother, do not lie!

(17) A more frequent event is swearwords directed directly to the Norwegian official when he informs the speaker about an adverse decision. The speaker is obviously not able to show his frustration in any other way but as a personal offence.

(18) To the police officer: "I am not shaking hands with shit."

On the other hand, the insults in example (19) about a lawyer can be interpreted as lack of trust in the lawyer's professional skills. This example reflects an attack on the lawyer's quality face. It is interesting that the public service user uses the third person: "this lawyer is a moron", perhaps indicating that the public service user expected that the comment would not be interpreted.

(19) In court: "It seems that this lawyer is a moron who slept until now and when he woke up he started to talk nonsense about some of his own other cases."

The interpreters identified a range of contexts such as police interviews, court cases, meetings with social services, therapeutic psychologists, and reception centers for asylum seekers where these examples occurred.

Impoliteness and threats to physical self

Several respondents gave examples of general threats, as in (20), when a person behaves or speaks in a threatening manner, or concrete threats (21) when a person takes action, such as deflating the interpreter's car tires.

(20) When visiting the psychologist, the patient is nervous and speaks in a threatening manner.

(21) The interpreter is often in a situation in which interpreter-users include him as an ally, and then it is expected that the interpreter will support their mutual interests. If the interpret fails to do so, he will be intimidated by threats, or even punished (for example, by having his car tires being deflated with a screwdriver).

It is important to pursue this topic in future research because interpreters can be exposed to threats and violence, not only in armed conflicts but also in public sector settings.

Interpreters' strategies for interpreting impoliteness

The final research question concerned interpreters' translation strategies. The following three strategies have been identified: (1) translating impoliteness words by using equivalents; (2) meta-commenting on impolite language; and (3) ignoring impoliteness.

The first strategy is exemplified in (22).

(22)   I try to find equivalents for curses and bad words. I translate everything in the way it was expressed, no matter how unpleasant.

Strategy one accords with paragraph §4 of the Guidelines for best practices in interpreting, which states that interpreter shall interpret everything that is being said without skipping, adding or changing anything. However, difficulties in finding equivalents are addressed by several respondents, as in example (23).

(23) Sometimes it was difficult to interpret swearing or threats as some expressions are culturally conditioned, for example "I will kill him!" "It is best for me to take my own life!" These words in Bosnian do not necessarily imply a real threat, but sometimes I have interpreted them word-for-word, which resulted in significant consequences for the person in question (acute child welfare services measure, for example).

The second strategy identified (24) is reporting that somebody is cursing without translating their actual utterances.

(24)   I call attention to the fact that the interlocutor is cursing, that he is uttering indecent words, and possibly what it is about, without direct translation of impoliteness…

The final strategy identified (25) is ignoring impoliteness altogether.

(25) My usual solution is to ignore the impolite words and forget it immediately after I finish interpreting.

Strategies two and three are a breach of professional guidelines. By denying the participants the ability to communicate in the way they want to communicate, the interpreter interferes and becomes an active communication participant.

Discussion

Two additional points emerge from the data. Firstly, directionality - who is impolite to whom - seems to be connected with particular types of impoliteness. Secondly, the interpreter occupies a special position as a "witness" of impoliteness in interpreter-mediated encounters.
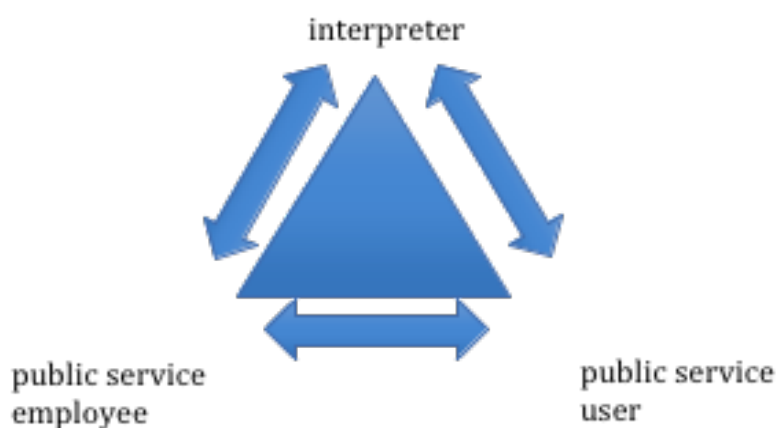

Figure 1: Directionality of impoliteness

As illustrated in Figure 1, there are nine possible scenarios when it comes to directionality of impoliteness:

1. interpreter offends public service employee

2. interpreter offends public service user

3. interpreter offends both

4. public service employee offends public service user

5. public service employee offends interpreter

6. public service employee offends both

7. public service user offends public service employee

8. public service user offends interpreter

9. public service user offends both.

Each communication participant can experience impoliteness from each one or both of the other two and can be impolite to each one or both of the other two. In addition, the interpreter, being the only one who can understand the language of both parties, can witness impoliteness between the public service employee and the public service user. In the survey interpreters were asked to give examples of two scenarios only: impoliteness directed towards them by either of the interpreter-users. They were not asked to give examples of impoliteness between public service employee and public service user, or examples of their own impoliteness towards the others. Nonetheless, interpreters gave examples of three scenarios: impoliteness directed towards them by either of the interpreter-users (the requested scenario), and impoliteness directed by interpreter-user towards the other. As mentioned above, this last scenario is a sort of "witnessing" impoliteness as a byproduct of the act of interpreting. Witnessing impoliteness can cause responses from interpreters. However, an interpreter's professional ethics do not allow him/her to respond. Nevertheless, some of the examples show that interpreters react either by hurt feelings that can influence the quality of interpreting or by withdrawing altogether from assignments, which halts interaction.

Interpreters gave examples having to do with face issues, rights issues, taboo words and issues connected to interpreter's physical self. However, these issues are not always clear-cut, and they often overlap. For example, an interpreter-user may not give the interpreter a level of attention appropriate to their professional relationship (an association rights issue), which may also mean that the user places a low value on interpreter's opinion (a face issue). Having said that, the findings suggest that some of these issues tend to appear in certain scenarios more often than in others. For example, witnessing impoliteness seems to be associated more often with rights issues than with face issues. Examples of taboo words (swearing) and actual physical threats appear more often from public service users than from public service employees. Public service employees seem to use implicational impoliteness more often than public service users. Part of explanation for these tendencies may be found in the balance of power in institutional encounters. Institutional encounters are asymmetric encounters. Public service employees have a power base (French & Raven, 1959) that derives from their official position. On the other hand, the service users are not powerless. They are protected by different rules and laws that state institutions follow in order to protect service users' rights. For example, the Norwegian Patients' Rights Act defines the rights patients have and sets for procedures for appealing breaches of those rights. The *Guidelines for Best Practices in Interpreting* are meant to provide the interpreter with a certain power base. A person's power base can be constructed on professional and

personal levels, which can further complicate communication. Power is not static and it is constructed mutually by the participants in each interaction. If we turn back to witnessing impoliteness, it appears to be connected with perceived power relations or, as Culpeper puts it, "impoliteness has to do with sense of fairness in social organization" (2011: 47).

The ambivalence resulting from different understandings of impoliteness and its functions, as well as different understandings of the interpreter's function, may be the reason for the different strategies that interpreters use when interpreting impoliteness.

Concluding remarks

This study is the first step towards focusing on different perceptions of impoliteness in interpreter-mediated interactions and consequences of such perceptions. The preliminary results of the survey among interpreters interpreting from BCMS and Norwegian paint a complex picture of the scope and types of experiences of impoliteness in institutional settings and the strategies used while interpreting. The picture is still one-dimensional because it presents only one side – the interpreter's own experience – of the three or more sides in interpreter-mediated interactions. Even though the number of respondents is limited, their answers point to certain tendencies. Contrary to the author's preconception that impoliteness is rare, the data show that impoliteness seems to be more common than expected. Impoliteness appears in many forms, according to the respondents. It can be verbal or nonverbal, and it can be direct—as in swearing, or indirect—as in implications. The respondents point to the connection between impoliteness, power, emotions, and intentionality—the elements that can influence the outcome of interpreter-mediated interactions. In rapport-management terms, the respondents illustrate their statements with a number of authentic examples of face and rights issues as well as taboo and physical self-issues. The examples describe the interpreter's self-esteem being under attack, a sense of humiliation, loss of credibility and trust issues.

Types of impoliteness seem to form different patterns, dependent on who is impolite to whom. For example, public service users swear more often than do public service employees. Finally, respondents give examples of different translation strategies they use in their work: interpreting what is being said, reporting that there is impolite language being uttered and ignoring impoliteness altogether. Two last strategies conflict with the *Guidelines for best practices in interpreting*. Choice of strategies can have direct influence (be it positive or negative) on the outcome of interpreter-mediated institutional dialogues. The way interpreters perceive impoliteness can influence their "doing" interpreting and "being" a professional interpreter.

All of this points to the significance of impoliteness in rapport management in interpreter-mediated institutional interactions and a need for more research. Insight into interpreters' and other communication participants' concerns leads to the next step: developing and systemizing strategies that can help all communication participants cope better with impoliteness in their work.

References:

Arundale, R. B. (2006). Face as relational and interactional: A communication framework for research on face, facework, and politeness. *Journal of Politeness Research* (2), 193–216. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/pr.2006.011

Arundale, R. B. (2010). Constituting face in conversation: Face, facework, and interactional achievement. *Journal of Pragmatics* (42), 2078–2105. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2009.12.021

Berk-Seligson, S. (2002). The impact of politeness in witness testimony: The influence of the court interpreter. In F. Pöchhacker & M. Shlesinger (eds.), *The Interpreting Studies Reader* (pp. 278–293). London: Routledge.

Blitvich, P. G.C. (2009). Impoliteness and identity in the American news media: The "culture wars." *Journal of Politeness Research* (5), 273–303. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2009.014

Bousfield, D. (2008). *Impoliteness in Interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/pbns.167

Bousfield, D., & Locher, M. A. (eds.). (2008). *Impoliteness in Language*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness. Some Universals in Language Usage.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Culpeper, J. (1996). Towards an anatomy of impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics* (25), 349-367. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(95)00014-3

Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511975752

Culpeper, J., Bousfield, D., & Wichmann, A. (2003). Impoliteness revisited: With special reference to dynamic and prosodic aspects. *Journal of Pragmatics* (35), 1545–1579. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00118-2

Dobs, A. & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, P. (2013). Impoliteness in interaction: Accounting for face-threat witness's responses. *Journal of Pragmatics* (53), 112-130. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.05.002

Ethical Guidelines for Public Service https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kilde... 19.06.2015

Felberg, T. R. (2013). Constructing ethnicity in a multilingual courtroom. Paper presented at the Critical Link 7 conference, Toronto.

French, J. R. P., & Raven, B. (1959). The Bases of Social Power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in Social power* (pp. 150-167). Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research.

Goffmann, E. (1967). On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction, reprinted from Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes, 18:3 (1955), 213-31, in Interactional Ritual, Essays on Face-to Face Behaviour. New York: Pantheon Books. http://anthropology.msu.edu/anp... 19.06.2015

Kelly, M., & Baker, C. (2013). *Interpreting the Peace*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Locher, M. A., & Wats, R. J. (2005). Politeness theory and relational work. *Journal of Politeness Research* (1), 9–33. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2005.1.1.9

Ljung, M. (1987). Banning i norsk, svensk og 19 andre språk. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Mason, I., & Stewart, M. (2001). Interactional pragmatics, face and the dialogue interpreter. In I. Mason (ed.), *Triadic Exchanges. Studies in Dialogue Interpreting* (pp. 51–71). Manchester: St Jerome Publishing.

Mills, S. (2009). Impoliteness in a cultural context. *Journal of Pragmatics* (41), 1047–1106.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2008.10.014

Norwegian Patients' Rights Act.
http://helsedirektoratet.no/publikasjoner/lov-om-pasientrettigheter...

Retningslinjer for god tolkeskikk (1997).
http://www.tolkeportalen.no/no/For-tolker/Tolkens-yrkesetikk/ 19.06.2015

Spencer-Oatey, H. (2002). Managing rapport in talk: Using rapport sensitive incidents to explore the motivational concerns underlying the management of relations. *Journal of Pragmatics* (34), 529–545.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(01)00039-X

Spencer-Oatey, H. (2005). (Im)politeness, face and perceptions of rapport: Unpackaging their bases and interrelationships. *Journal of Politeness Research* (1), 95–119.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2005.1.1.95

Spencer-Oatey, H. (2007). Theories of identity and the analysis of face. *Journal of Pragmatics* (39), 639–656. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.12.004

Spencer-Oatey, H. (ed.). (2013 [2000]). *Culturally Speaking, Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory*. London: Bloomsbury.

Spencer-Oatey, H., & Franklin, P. (2009). *Intercultural Interaction. A Multidisciplinary Approach to Intercultural Communication*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230244511

Wadensjö, C. (1998). *Interpreting as Interaction*. London: Longman.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

This is a questionnaire about interpreting of indecent/impolite utterances in institutional dialogues in the public sector in Norway. You have received this questionnaire because you are registered as an interpreter in the Norwegian register of interpreters (tolkeportalen.no) or you have attended interpreting courses. I hope you will contribute some of your valuable time to filling out this questionnaire, thereby adding to knowledge about this phenomenon in interpreting in the Norwegian context.

My name is AUTHOR and I am XXXX. I am studying the phenomenon of impoliteness for several reasons. First, interpreting students at HiOA often mention that they have problems translating swearwords. Swearwords are one of the extreme forms of impoliteness. However, there are other, milder forms. In my previous research on impoliteness in the media in Croatia and Montenegro, which I conducted together with my colleague NAME, this phenomenon turned out to be more frequent than we expected.

The aim of this survey is to gather information about the following:

1. Your experiences with interpreter-users; and
2. Your experiences with solving interpreting problems in practice.

Because this survey is anonymous, I ask that you describe examples in such a way that they cannot be recognized (you may omit or change names, places, or institutions, change gender, etc.)

By filling out this questionnaire, you agree that the anonymous results of this research can be published in research articles or used for educational purposes.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at:

NAME

Thank you for your participation!

The record of your survey responses does not contain any identifying information about you, unless a specific survey question explicitly asked for it. If you used an identifying token to access this survey, please rest assured that this token will not be stored together with your responses. It is managed in a separate database and will be updated only to indicate whether you did (or did not) complete this survey. There is no way of matching identification tokens with survey responses.

Questions about you:

1. Gender
   a. Male
   b. Female
2. How many years have you worked as interpreter?
   a. 1–5
   b. 6–10
   c. More than 10

Your experience with impoliteness:

3. In newer sociolinguistic literature, impoliteness is defined as use of verbal language (including insinuations, allusions, etc.) and non-verbal language (gestures, ways of looking at somebody, ignoring, etc.) that can be understood as offensive by the recipient of the message. How would you define rudeness/impoliteness?
4. Have you ever experienced indecency/impoliteness from a Norwegian speaker?
5. Describe some situations in which you experienced indecency/impoliteness *from a Norwegian speaker.*
6. Have you ever experienced indecency/impoliteness *from a Bosnian/Croatian/ Montenegrin/Serbian (BCMS)* speaker?
7. Describe some situations in which you experienced indecency/impoliteness from a BCMS speaker.

Translating impoliteness

8. Have you ever been in a situation in which you had to translate indecent/impolite terms *from Norwegian* into BCMS?
9. How often has this happened to you?
   a. 1 to 5 times
   b. 6 to 10 times
   c. More than 10 times
10. Have you ever been in a situation in which you had to translate indecent/impolite terms *from BCMS* into Norwegian?
11. How often has this happened to you?
    a. 1 to 5 times
    b. 6 to 10 times
    c. More than 10 times
12. Describe some examples of your own solutions for interpreting indecency/ impoliteness.
13. Additional comments?

Thank you very much for filling out this questionnaire and contributing to knowledge about interpreting in Norway!