

A Zimbabwean perspective on the interpreter's role perception and implications for performance during court proceedings

Svongoro P, Mvundura E

Abstract

This article explores whether court interpreting in Zimbabwe's courts of law facilitates communication between the speakers of the various languages who are subject to the courts either as the accused persons or as witnesses. The investigation revolves around the role and function of the court interpreter and the effectiveness of court interpreting as a form of language mediation. Specifically, the study investigates the contention between, on the one hand, the impression of the role of the interpreter as a translating device, reflected in Hoffman's (1994) guidelines for court interpreters in Zimbabwe and, on the other hand, the reality of the interpreting situation. The study is based on the analysis of the primary handbook for interpreters in Zimbabwe i.e. *A Guide to Interpreting in Judicial Proceedings* by Hoffman (1994). Data from the analysis of the handbook were supplemented by observation of open court proceedings and structured and semi-structured interviews with court interpreters. The findings presented in this article reveal that, because court interpreters are mindful that their primary goal is to ensure that participants fully understand each other's communicative intentions, they depart from some of the rules prescribed in their handbook by adopting a strategy in which they convey renditions which would ensure that a speaker's communicative motive, and not only his/her actual words, is available to an end recipient. In this way, the interpreters' renditions, as confirmed by my findings, support the expectation that court interpreters are always mindful of the need to convey the speakers' meaning in full. Although the findings of this study are based on data from a Zimbabwean context, many of the issues raised in this study would be of interest to other interpreter-mediated courtrooms

Key words: interpreter's role, language mediation, effective communication

Introduction

The study explores the role and effectiveness of court interpreting in Zimbabwe in relation to its function and in terms of standards of interpreting as set out in Hoffman's (1994), *A Guide to Interpreting in Judicial Proceedings*. The function of interpreting must be viewed in the context of its role, i.e. what is the role of interpreting in relation to the court and the other participants who are affected by the court's processes. Interpreting should meet the needs of the court and the other participants who have their own everyday language.

The Zimbabwean bilingual courtroom could be regarded as a special context in the sense that the court officials in an English-medium trial also speak the language(s) of the accused/witness, although the trial is conducted in the language of the court, i.e. English. In such a unique context, the interpreter is not the only bilingual participant. This is unlike many other bilingual settings where court officials do not speak the language of the accused/witness. In such a setting, the different court players strategically use various aspects of language which court interpreters have to deal with in their interpretations on a daily basis.

Thus, the central aim of this study is to explore the contested role of the interpreter during the three-party communication process in this special context. Specifically, the study investigates the contention between, on the one hand, the impression of the role of the interpreter as a mere translating device, reflected in court interpreters' guidelines such as those referred to above by Hoffman (1994) and, on the other hand, the real world of the interpreting setting in the courtroom.

The research questions

This study seeks to answer the following two research questions:

- (1) To what extent do court interpreters follow the rules (presented above among others) prescribed by Hoffman's (1994) guidelines for court interpreters in Zimbabwe?
- (2) To what extent, and with what effect, do court interpreters in Zimbabwe act outside the rules prescribed by Hoffman's (1994) guidelines for court interpreters?
- (3) What implications do court interpreters' performance have on future training for court interpreters?

My expectation is that the primary mandate of court interpreters is successful interaction. In order for this target to be achieved, court interpreters are aware that participants will have to fully comprehend each other's meaning. For this primary purpose to be achieved, court interpreters avoid providing mere literal versions of speakers' source language utterances as set out in Hoffmann (1994) and Feltoe (1993), as this does not necessarily lead to comprehensive understanding. End receivers who are "unaccustomed with the context" (linguistic and/or situational) of the interaction will not be able to fully infer speaker meaning (Hale, 2011).

I thus established the following two expectations:

- (1) Court interpreters' verbal behaviour reflects, first and foremost, their commitment to enabling successful communication in the courtroom.
- (2) As a result of this commitment, court interpreters' target language (TL) discourse will reveal a variety of emphasising and down-toning additions and omissions, most of which are different from real errors committed unconsciously.
- (3) Interpreters' actual performance in court provide new insights into interpreter training in the future.

The context of the research problem

From Ancient Egypt to the 21st century, interpreters have enabled communication between speakers of minority and majority languages. This means that the practice of interpreting from one language form into another on the African continent, as elsewhere, goes back thousands of years. Although this observation emphasises the critical role played by the interpreter since the origins of cross-linguistic communication, it is paradoxical that the interpreters' role, which has occupied centre stage, remains one that is highly misunderstood and, as a result, contested (Angelelli, 2004).

In most African countries, research (e.g. Usadolo, 2010; Lebesse, 2013; Svongoro and Kadenge, 2015) has shown that a misunderstanding of the interpreter's role is worsened by the absence of clear legislation defining the role of court interpreters. Lebesse (2013: iv) points out that "this has resulted in legal officials (magistrates and judges) forming their own opinions as to what the role of court interpreters is". Angelelli (2004) identifies a number of interpreter roles. For example, the interpreter in her glass booth facilitates communication during international conferences. In a hospital, medical interpreters are critical in treating the health of an ailing patient. In a court of law, another interpreter helps to bring justice to speakers of minority languages.

In the case of Zimbabwe's pre-independence justice system, those who could speak English, the language of the former colonial master, provided language mediation between the majority Shona or isiNdebele speaking Africans and the minority English speaking magistrates and district administrators (DAs) who were the administrators of colonial justice. If communication is to succeed in each of these settings, the interpreter must be attuned to the social realities of the speakers and pay attention to the socio-cultural factors affecting communication, such as the social background of the interlocutors, or the constraints imposed by the context of the interpreted communicative situation. Interpreters in the above mentioned examples have a similar objective - to expedite communication.

Facilitating communication is, therefore, the basis for the interpreters' role. A unique feature of this role since its origin was that it was performed between two parties that did not share the same status (Angelelli, 2004). This difference in power and status has characterised the field since its conception, and these power differentials vary from one situation to another, as does the nature of situated practices. Although interpreters have always been necessary, not only for bridging communication

between individuals who speak different languages but, also, for reducing the social disparities among them, their role remains one that is highly obscure and, consequently, a subject for debate.

According to Angelelli (2004), interpreters have been required since ancient times to take an oath stating that they would interpret without bias, neither omitting nor adding anything. The assumption at the time was that a rendition could be unbiased, and that the interpreting of the meaning of the message was independent of the interpreter him/herself and of how the parties constructed it.

Today, too, the chief concern of most interpreter organisations is accuracy (Jacobsen, 2002). Interpreters are expected to relay accurate renditions of a message. There are some who even expect the interpreter to make communication between parties as “smooth as it would be” if the parties shared a common language (Hoffman, 1994: 16). According to Angelelli (2004), most of the codes of ethics of many organisations set this insurmountable goal as an achievable reality and, as a result, a tension has emerged between the dictated and the actual role of the interpreter.

The main concern of professional interpreter organisations was to dictate how that role should be played out rather than to understand the complexity of the role that interpreters play as they facilitate communication in various contexts of their work. The problem that arises from such dictation is that it leads to the distortion of the reality of the interpreter at work, limiting the opportunities for understanding the multifaceted and complex role that interpreters play.

Hale (2004) rightly points out that the different contexts in which interpreters perform, and the people for whom they interpret, impose different challenges and needs on the interpreted communicative events they facilitate. Thus, their role as interpreters undergoes constant change in order to satisfy those needs and constraints. This is a part of the practice of interpreting that should not be overlooked. In spite of the progress made in the last two decades in which the perception of the interpreter’s role has shifted from a language conduit to an essential partner in cross-cultural conversation or a co-participant to the interaction (Angelelli, 2004; Svongoro, 2015), interpreters’ guidelines, such as those laid down in Hoffman (1994) for court interpreters in Zimbabwe, continue to perpetuate the traditional view of the interpreter as a translating gadget, simply transferring linguistic products from one language into another (Jacobsen, 2002) as shall be seen in the analysis of Hoffman’s (1994) rules for interpreters below.

However, from the 1980s, as empirical studies on the portrayal of the interpreter began to emerge, the traditional view of the interpreter began to be challenged. Although most of these studies were conducted in one specific setting, utilising ethnographies of communication and discourse analysis (cf. Jacobsen, 2003; Hale, 2004), the studies began to advance a more visible role of the interpreter. However, in disregard of the evidence presented in these studies, many professional organisations still continue to state that interpreters are neutral, objective conduits in the communicative event. Such a view about the role that interpreters play continues

to be overshadowed by the invisible ideology perpetuated by the existing form of practice.

In view of the above contestations regarding the role of the interpreter, this study attempts a closer investigation of court interpreting in Zimbabwe to obtain a deeper understanding about interpreters' responsibilities, about what they do, what they think they should do, and what others expect them to do in "face-to-face" courtroom trials which have their own constraints as well as being constrained by societal norms (Mason, 2001).

Justification of the study

Court interpreting plays a pivotal role in facilitating communication between speakers of different languages. This means that the court interpreter has a heavy responsibility in the administration of justice, because upon him/her depends, to a huge extent, the proper elucidation of the issues at hand so as to avoid miscarriage of justice. Thus, upon his/her interpretation may depend the liberty, reputation or, at times, the very lives of the accused persons. From this, interpreting is therefore, an integral part of courtroom communication. If the interpreter fails to interpret accurately, serious consequences on the trial will result.

However, contrary to the above demands on interpreting, interpreters in Zimbabwe have, on many occasions, been accused of misrepresenting what the accused and or witnesses are saying in Shona. One such allegation appeared in the *Daily News* of 9 March 2011 ("Lawyer walks out of court over interpreter"). But although interpreting is considered a critical part of courtroom communication, and the importance that is attached to accurate interpretations, no comprehensive study on interpreting in Zimbabwe has, to my knowledge, been conducted.

In view of this contention between the role of the court interpreter as prescribed by Hoffman (1994) and the reality of what actually takes place in an interpreter-mediated trial, the current study seeks to undertake a comprehensive and empirical study of court interpreting in Zimbabwe. By so doing, it is hoped that the researcher will be able to elicit a deeper understanding of the basis of the above conflict and other related allegations against court interpreters. Interpreting, as will have become clear by now, is an integral part of courtroom communication. Hence, if the interpreter makes mistakes, whether these are omissions, additions or replacements it may impact the trial as well as the delivery of justice.

In spite of the close connection and importance of language to law, local linguists have not paid much attention this. As a result, the role of linguistics in analysing courtroom discourse has not been a target of serious empirical investigation in the Zimbabwean context. The studies by Van Grieken (2001) cited above, as well as Svongoro's (2007) investigation of linguistic features of courtroom discourse, do at least attempt to place the subject in a Zimbabwean context. However, much of what is written in these studies is of a prescriptive nature and based on very limited courtroom evidence. It is in light of this paucity of research that I have undertaken a serious corpus-based linguistic study of consecutively interpreted rape trials in Zimbabwean courtrooms.

Finally, this study is also critical as it provides insights from an understudied context i.e. the Zimbabwean courtroom. Insights from this study will not only help explain interpreting strategies and norm-based interpreting behaviour, but will also show how source language texts may be similar or different from interpreted texts in the target language. Such invaluable insights are essential for improving interpreter training.

The methodology

The study is primarily based on the analysis of the primary handbook for interpreters in Zimbabwe i.e. *A Guide to Interpreting in Judicial Proceedings* by Hoffman (1994). In particular, Hoffman prescribes 23 rules for interpreters which they should follow and not deviate from in the course of their work. Out of the 23 rules, below, I present four of Hoffman's (1994: 14) rules for interpreters in Zimbabwe which formed the basis of the data collected and analysed in this study:

- (1) The interpreter shall not him/herself add or enlarge on any statement made by a "speaker".
- (2) The interpreter shall not him/herself put any question to any "speaker", unless the answer to such question is necessary to enable the interpreter to grasp the "intended idea".
- (3) The interpreter shall not omit or fail to interpret any part of any utterance because it is not understood by him/her, or because he/she thinks it should not be interpreted, unless he/she informs the bench of his/her omission.
- (4) The interpreter shall not directly or indirectly alter the style, force or impact of any utterance be it a question or a statement of fact.

Data from the analysis of the handbook were supplemented by observation of open court proceedings to appreciate interpreter's actual performance during proceedings and structured and semi-structured interviews with court interpreters. The interviews with court interpreters elicited interpreters' view about their understanding of Hoffman's rules and the extent to which they apply in practical interpreting situations in court. The interviews also elicited their views about whether Hoffman's rules aided or impeded their work and the areas the interpreters felt could be changed to enable them to perform their role more effectively.

The collected data were analysed using Wadensjö's (1998) interpreting as interaction approach. According to Roy (2000), Wadensjö's (1998) interpreting as interaction approach is about "interpreter-mediated conversations as a mode of communication, about interpreters and their responsibilities, about what they do, what they think they should do and what others expect them to do in face-to-face, institutional encounters". Wadensjö (1998) applies the approach to examine empirical data recorded during interpreter-mediated encounters within medical, legal, and social services settings. Using this approach, Wadensjö (1998) shows what interpreters and primary speakers actually do as they come together and what they think they are doing when they talk to each other. Wadensjö's work (1998) is theoretically grounded in analytical frameworks of the nature of social organisation and in the

dialogic nature of language and interaction. Wadensjö (1998) offers a seminal perspective of the interpreter as an engaged actor solving not only problems of translation, but also problems of mutual understanding in situated interaction. Applying a dialogic framework revealed that interpreting consists of two interdependent activities, namely translation and coordination, further evidenced by the fact that interpreters create two kinds of talk, namely talk that is generated from relaying a message, and talk that is generated from the interpreter to assist or mediate the flow of talk. When the performance of the interpreter's role is investigated as interaction, then the interpreter is studied in relation to a relevant audience or the role that he/she performs with others. It becomes self-evident that "the dialogue interpreter must be conceived of as both relayer and co-ordinator" (Goffman, 1981: 266). Wadensjö (1998) explains how interpreters both listen and speak within shifting stances of their own participation, shifting from relaying to coordinating the interaction. Thus, from time to time, interpreters change the level and degree of their participation.

Again, in the context of this study, one would expect the interpreter's level and degree of participation to change depending on the stage of the criminal trial. Wadensjö's (1998) interpreting as interaction approach is significant for the current study because it profoundly changes the current vision, or ideology, of what interpreters are doing. It changes how interpreters and their work are perceived and, hence, how interpreting is taught. Since Wadensjö, more and more researchers, the current included, are turning towards an interactive, discourse-oriented approach to interpreting.

It is for the succinctness and detail of the interpreting as interaction approach that I adopt this approach which also allows for a closer sociolinguistic and discourse analytic study of the role of interpreters during rape trials in Zimbabwean courtrooms.

Interpreter's role perceptions

According to Angelelli (2004), the last two decades of the 20th century witnessed a shift in the perception of the interpreter's role from a language conduit to an essential partner in cross-cultural conversation or, in other words, a co-constructor of the interaction with agency (Angelelli, 2004: 36). Research utilising a sociolinguistic lens has illustrated crucial differences in the participatory role of interpreters, and these differences depend upon the nature of the interpreted communicative event (Jacobsen, 2003; Roy, 2000 and Wadensjö, 1998). The fact that the interpreter constructs, co-constructs, repairs, and facilitates the talk during an interpreted encounter proves her/his role as a co-participant (Jacobsen, 2003; Roy, 2000 and Wadensjö, 1998). Wadensjö (1998) points out that speakers in a communication encounter and interpreters co-construct conversation.

Well-documented ethnographies of interpreters in the courtroom (Berk-Seligson, 1990), the hospital (Angelelli, 2004), academia (Roy, 2000), medical settings (Metzger, 1999), the immigration office, the police station (Wadensjö, 1995, 1998) and the community are evidence of the visibility (Angelelli, 2004) of interpreters. These

studies (e.g. Metzger, 1999) have challenged the notion of neutrality by studying the participation of interpreters during interactions (Metzger, 1999) and by considering interpreting as a special case of interaction (Wadensjö, 1998) with interpreters sharing responsibility (Roy, 2000).

However, in spite of the above perceptions of the role of the interpreter, the conceptualisation of the interpreter as a conduit or a ghost (Roy, 2000) is still prevalent, especially in research on conference and court interpreters. The issues of role and role conflict are more common in the area of court interpreting research (Berk-Seligson, 1990). The evasiveness and complexity of the interpreter's role in cross-linguistic interaction have led different categories of people to express varying impressions about the role of the interpreter. As a result, there are a number of different monikers for people in the profession. According to Roy (2000), some perceive the interpreter in the rigid and narrow view of being a "machine" or "conduit"; others in the glorifying view of being "advocates" or "champions" (see examples cited by Tate and Turner, 2002); while for some, interpreters are "agents of culture and negotiators" (e.g. Roy, 2002).

Using methods such as interviews, surveys and ethnographic interviews, interpreting researchers have conducted studies to obtain perceptions of service providers (Kelly, 2000), minority speakers (Hale, 2004), and interpreters themselves (Angelelli, 2003) on the role of interpreters in the courtroom. These studies were conducted because it was important to determine whether court interpreters were aware of what their role was, the limits thereof, and reasons for acting beyond their established functions. The results of the studies generally seem to indicate that the majority of practicing court interpreters tend to go beyond the limits provided by codes of ethics.

The above studies also describe how interpreters were seen to adopt a more active role than would be expected and how this can influence the end result of their work. In spite of the weaknesses in the research, such as instruments and sample sizes used in some of these studies, their findings are important in empirically confirming much of the anecdotal evidence regarding role perceptions. According to Hale (2004), viewed in a broad historical perspective, interpreters often appear as all-round intermediaries carrying out a number of functions in addition to their translational task.

It was only with the emergence of conference interpreting as a profession in the 20th century that sharper boundaries emerged for what interpreters in highly visible international settings would or would not do. As conference interpreters found themselves working in the simultaneous mode from the booth, the confines of their role in the communication process became even narrower, with little chance for direct interaction with the communicating parties other than by their audible translation output. However, beyond international settings, Hale (2004) observes that the role of the interpreter has remained characteristically fluid.

The pioneering efforts of signed-language interpreters in the U.S., which date back to the 1960s, are a case in point. Charged with enabling communication in situations of

obvious inequality, namely between representatives of mainstream institutions on the one hand and underprivileged, “disabled” individuals on the other, interpreters were naturally portrayed in a helper role which extended to whatever actions needed to be performed. According to González et al. (1991), sign language interpreters in the U.S. and elsewhere have made great strides in clarifying and re-defining their roles, particularly by establishing a professional code of ethics, training programmes and accreditation. In the same way, the 1980s and 1990s saw spoken language interpreters in community settings also establishing codes of conduct and standards of practice, particularly for court and medical interpreting.

Nevertheless, Berk-Seligson (1990) notes that interpreters in the public service have continued to grapple with role definitions, given the diversity of socio-cultural and institutional constraints shaping their work in any given national environment. Against this background which is characterised by the elusiveness and complexity of the interpreters role in cross-linguistic interaction (Roy, 2000), practising interpreters have written about the interpreter’s role.

Although individual practitioners differ in their definitions and descriptions of the interpreter’s role, they seem to have one thing in common: moving away from the normative role of the interpreter to roles which reflect the actual or real situations (Tate and Turner, 2002).

Court Interpreting in Zimbabwe

Madhuku (2010: 86) observes that, “the nature of court procedures in Zimbabwe tend to rely more on oral rather than written presentations of argument and thus hearings tend to be lengthy”. Such a unique bilingual courtroom impacts on the interactional dynamics of the courtroom communicative process and potentially on the administration of justice. To ensure that the rights for such persons are protected, interpreters are provided for Shona, Ndebele and speakers of other languages in court (Zimbabwe Judicial Services Commission website, 2013). The nature of the Zimbabwean courtroom and the government’s commitment to the provision of interpreting services are, therefore, an interesting area of linguistics research. In the sections below, I further explore some critical aspects regarding court interpreting in Zimbabwe.

The language situation and the development of court interpreting

Zimbabwe is a multilingual country, with English as its official language, and Shona and Ndebele as the predominant languages in their respective geographic spheres. Besides Shona and Ndebele, a few other African languages are also spoken in Zimbabwe (Viriri, 2003). These include Kalanga, Nambya, Tonga, Venda, Tsonga, Nyanja and Tswana. Shona is widely spoken across the country by 75%, and Ndebele by about 16% of the population (Viriri, 2003). This is probably the reason why Zimbabwe is listed among the countries with one predominant African language. Although Zimbabwe is said to have the highest literacy rate in the SADC region, some Zimbabweans are illiterate and cannot communicate in English. Even though some may have some proficiency in English, they do not have the level of

proficiency in English required in sensitive communication settings such as the courtroom.

As pointed out by Svongoro and Kadenge (2015), little material exists on the historical background of court interpreting in Zimbabwe. As a result, information on the subject is largely based on oral interviews with chief and senior interpreters based at Magistrates' Courts in Zimbabwe. The oldest of these interpreters I had the opportunity to interact with has been employed for around 40 years. From this long-serving interpreter, I learnt that the first interpreters in Zimbabwe, then Southern Rhodesia, were brought in from South Africa by the first white settlers in the 19th century. The interpreter's duties were that of a clerk and he/she was, therefore, expected to be able to read and write. Hale (2004) reports the same situation in Malaysia where the courts require interpreters to act as court clerks, ushers, clerical staff and even lawyers, with no training at all. These working conditions interpreters are sometimes exposed to have a bearing on their work.

Because a Western kind of education was not yet available in Southern Rhodesia, interpreters were brought in from South Africa although proper training for even these interpreters was not yet available until the late 1990s (Moeketsi and Wallmach, 2005). Later, with the introduction of Western education in Southern Rhodesia, a select few, educated to standard three or four (equivalent to today's Grades 5 and 6) would be employed as clerks with the Native Affairs Department. These clerks were picked quite randomly as the Native Affairs Department was not too particular about their standard of education (see also Svongoro & Kadenge, 2015). This situation was similar to in the one in South Africa before 1994 (Moeketsi and Wallmach, 2005) and other African countries in which colonial languages dominated in all administrative and legal functions. In South Africa, as Moeketsi and Wallmach (2005) observe, English and Afrikaans are the languages of the courts of law even though the majority of cases (about 90%) involve speakers of indigenous languages.

In the past, court interpreters in South Africa's law courts were compelled to serve under judges and magistrates who were agents of the apartheid regime and would thus neither concern themselves about the proper training of court interpreters, nor encourage any improvement in their working conditions. When Hoffmann joined the profession in the mid-20th century, certain requirements were introduced, such as a working knowledge of Shona, Ndebele and Chewa. The interpreters were all black Africans as the white settlers did not have sufficient knowledge of the local languages. In 1970, the majority of the interpreters in Salisbury (Harare) were black, with two white interpreters (Hoffmann and du Plooy) and one coloured. Also, until 1981, all interpreters were men as it was believed that some jobs could not be performed by women. This situation has changed dramatically as the majority of court interpreters in Zimbabwe are now women. This also tends to be the global trend. The clerks-cum-interpreters were highly regarded by the black population because they knew the white man's language and understood the white man's law. Even when education became more widespread, the interpreters were still powerful because of their knowledge of legal terminology.

The physical layout of the courtroom and participants

Apart from being confused and mystified by the language of court actors, ordinary citizens in Zimbabwe are further challenged by the physical layout of the courtroom and the general positions of the participants. Apart from the defence and prosecution teams wearing black gowns and suits, the magistrate is clad in red robes and occupies a raised platform. The interpreter is also a common player in the proceedings. The accused occupies the accused's box while the witness takes the witness stand. This strange environment creates an uneven playing field characterised by unequal power-play (Fairclough, 1999) and rules governing who says what and at what time which further makes the courts inaccessible to the ordinary citizens they are designed to serve.

Policy requirements on the provision of court interpreters

The policy position regarding court interpreting in Zimbabwe is enshrined in the National Language Policy (1998), the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act and the Magistrates' Court Act. These form the main policy documents. To protect linguistic human and cultural rights, Zimbabwe's National Language Policy (1998) and the Constitution (articles 82 and 87) are explicit about the need to provide court interpreters where the accused/complainant is not familiar with the language of the courts of law, namely English. The courts in Zimbabwe recognise English as the language of the court and therefore strictly adheres to article 18(3) (f) of the Constitution, which states that all persons shall be permitted to have, without payment, the assistance of an interpreter if they cannot understand the language used during the trial, i.e. English.

To ensure that the linguistic rights for such persons are protected, interpreters are provided for Shona, Ndebele and the other 14 officially recognised languages in court (Constitution of 75 Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013 and Zimbabwe Judicial Services Commission website, 2013). The current constitution clearly provides an enabling policy environment for the promotion of multilingual services provision and guarantees the respect of linguistic human rights. Section (70) (1) (j); 2(a), (b) states that: Any person accused of an offence has the following right... "to have the proceedings of the trial into a language that they understand"; (2) (a) Where this section requires information to be given to a person – the information must be given in a language the person understands; and; (b) if the person cannot read or write, any document embodying the information must be explained in such a way that the person understands it. (Italic my own emphasis.) The above clauses reveal that there is oral, sign and sight interpreting that should take place in the Zimbabwean courts. These clauses contain firm instructions which are expressed in the deontic use of the legal must which expresses the mandatory need for the provision of interpreting services in Zimbabwean courts.

Observations in selected magistrate courts carried out during the study revealed that these clauses are generally adhered to, but that English, Shona, Ndebele and Sign Language, to some extent, enjoy the lion's share when it comes to the provision of interpreting services in Zimbabwean courts. These are followed by official minority languages such as Tonga in their areas of concentration. In Zimbabwe there is also significant interpreting and translation into foreign languages such as French,

Portuguese and German. Trials involving Mandarin speakers resident in Zimbabwe are also on the increase, following the government's Look East policy which was meant to strengthen trade and bilateral relations with China and other countries of the Eastern bloc. However, despite these clear constitutional provisions, a number of concerns can be raised with regard to court interpreting in Zimbabwe.

The first concern cited by Ndlovu (2016) relates to the denial of a fair trial to the arrested, accused and detained during the arrest, interrogation, compilation of charge sheet and opening of the docket which constitutes the foundation of court proceedings. Arrested person are, in most cases, denied justice and the right to a fair trial because during arrest they do not have the right to give a statement or respond to charges in the language of their choice. This is so because the Constitution of Zimbabwe does not mention the right to an interpreter during the preliminary levels of opening a case.

The second concern relates to the arresting officers who provide the interpreting and translation services without any prior training in these fields. It is not unusual for a person to be arrested by someone who does not speak or understand their language. The arresting officers then have to do lot of interpreting and translation of statements during the compilation of charge sheets and statements which are submitted to the courts in English, yet they would have been given in a local language or any other language which is not English. One wonders how much information is gained, lost, distorted, or remain untranslated and misinterpreted during the process.

Although significant strides have been made towards fulfilling this constitutional requirement by ensuring that all courts provide interpreters as and when required, the effort has not been supported by either the availability of clear guidelines in terms of the qualifications for interpreters, a properly designed curriculum to ensure the availability of qualified interpreters or by the existence of a professional association, which would ensure that there is a professional code of ethics to which members must adhere or face sanction. As regards the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act, relevant sections regarding court interpreting are Sections 264 (ii); 319F (1) (a). The sections state that: 264 Proof of evidence and statements given or made at preparatory examination Subject to the proviso to subsection (1) of section eighty-four, in any proceedings in any court -... (ii) purports to have been certified As correct under the hand of the person who transcribes such record; shall, upon its mere production by any person, be prima facie evidence of such statement or evidence, as the case may be, and, if the same was made or given as aforesaid through an interpreter or interpreters, of the correctness of the interpretation. 319F Persons who may be appointed as intermediaries or support persons (1) Except in special circumstances, which the court shall record, a court shall not appoint a person as an intermediary unless that person- (a) is or has been employed by the State as an interpreter in criminal cases; and..

The sections of the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act above make provision for court interpreting mandatory although they do not state the qualifications of the interpreter who provides the service. This may imply that interpretation services

may be offered by any person ordered by the court to do so. There is need for the act to specify the qualifications of this person, especially given that the qualifications of other court officials are explicitly specified in other policy documents.

Apart from the above, relevant sections regarding interpreting in the Magistrates' Court Act, are Sections 5; 7; and 69. The Act states that the proceedings in all cases shall be in the English language and shall be carried out in open court and that the proceedings may be conducted in any other language agreed upon by parties and the presiding magistrate. It further states that the records of the proceedings of the court shall be kept in the English language and shall be accessible to the public under the supervision of the clerk of the court at all convenient times upon payment of a stipulated fee. This makes clear the supremacy of the English language in a dispensation which promotes the equitable treatment and use of all officially recognised languages. It also becomes apparent that this act has not been aligned with the new constitutional provisions of ensuring equal treatment of all officially recognised languages and their parity of esteem. In as much as the court is an open court, there is no guarantee of interpretation services as English is the language of proceedings. The public is also not guaranteed of translation services. There is silence on interpretation services in this section, yet we expect this to be said here. An interpreter is only mentioned in Section 69 and only in terms of the administration of oath, not in terms of the actual interpretation of the proceedings. As in the constitution, there is silence on the qualifications of the interpreter.

From the above, although the National Language Policy, the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act and the Magistrates Court Act make provisions for the court interpreter, they present a weak case for the full provision of interpretation and translation services. The prominence placed on English, for instance, indicates the lack of will to ensure parity of esteem and equitable use of all the officially recognised languages. Effectively, this means that the covert language policy of Zimbabwe is one that recognises English as the sole official language and language of record. Besides, where these documents make reference to the interpreter, they are not explicit about the qualifications the interpreter should hold to qualify for the position. As such, they seem to violate the citizens' linguistic human rights as their access to justice and a fair trial are compromised. They do not embrace the constitutional duty to treat all the officially recognised languages equitable.⁷⁸

An analysis of Hoffman's rules for interpreters in Zimbabwe

Interpreting in Zimbabwean courts is governed by certain principles which Hoffman (1994: 4) terms "*Rules of court interpretation*". These are considered fundamental principles of the system of court interpretation and any breach of them amounts to an irregularity. They are those acts which an interpreter is obliged to and prohibited from performing. Any interpreter is also entitled to certain rights to enable him/her to perform his/her duties properly, and these rights have been included in the rules. Interpreters are required to obey these rules and are entitled to be granted these rights.

Although most of these rules generally provide interpreters in Zimbabwe with crucial reference material, some of the rules seem to violate best practices for court interpreting which emphasise that court interpreters should interpret in a manner that speakers of any language can fully participate in the judicial process and gain access to justice (Hale, 2011). This means that as officers of the court, interpreters hold a specific duty and responsibility to deliver high-quality court interpreting. Table 1 shows the 23 rules which guide court interpreting in Zimbabwean courtrooms (Hoffman, 1994: 27-38). However, out of the 23 rules, only 13 were considered for closer analysis. They were chosen because, on the one hand, they are an integral part of the work of interpreters. On the other hand, they were chosen on the basis of their controversy to interpreting as alluded to some the interpreters themselves. Finally, some of the rules excluded for analysis are not in essence rules but some of the rights that interpreters should enjoy.

Table 1: Hoffman’s Rules for Court Interpreters in Zimbabwe

Rule	The rule’s prescription
1	A court interpreter shall interpret faithfully, to the best of his/her ability and without fear, favour or prejudice.
2	The interpreter shall allow a witness the option of taking the oath or of making a declaration to speak the truth.
3	The interpreter shall not himself/herself add to or enlarge on any statement made by a “speaker”.
4	The interpreter shall not himself/herself put any question to any speaker, unless the answer to such question is necessary to enable the interpreter to grasp the “idea intended”.
5	The interpreter shall not himself/herself answer any question put by a speaker, unless the question was put to him/her directly to enable the listener to grasp the “intended idea”.
6	The interpreter shall not himself/herself construct a “plea” from the remarks made by an accused.
7	The interpreter shall either put to the witness in question form or interpret to the bench all remarks made by an accused when he is asked if he has any questions to put to the witness in cross-examination.
8	The interpreter shall inform the bench of the fact whenever a “speaker” is using a language other than his mother tongue, and he, the interpreter is aware of it.
9	The interpreter shall satisfy himself/herself that the accused can hear and understand everything that is said by a “speaker”.
10	The interpreter shall immediately inform the bench should he/she have any doubt as to whether a listener understands and appreciates a question or

	statement interpreted to him.
11	The interpreter shall bring to the notice of the bench any peculiarity concerning any “speaker” or “listener” which may affect the case.
12	The interpreter shall put all the “alternative charges” to an accused before asking him to plead.
13	The interpreter shall not interpret any question, nor convey any idea, in such a manner that his interpretation amounts to a “leading question” or suggests an answer to the “listener”.
14	The interpreter shall immediately bring the fact to the notice of the bench should he have any doubt as to whether he/she can properly understand any “speaker”, or any “listener” can properly understand him/her.
15	The interpreter shall not omit or fail to interpret any part of any utterance because it is not understood by him/her, or because he/she thinks it should not be interpreted, unless he informs the bench of this omission.
16	The interpreter shall immediately inform the bench when he has reason to believe that he/she has made an error or omission.
17	The interpreter shall not interpret as having been uttered (by words) any “idea” made known to him/her by a sign, indication or demonstration.
18	The interpreter, when giving evidence, should not state that he/she interpreted correctly.
19	The interpreter has the right to ask for, and to receive, any document to be interpreted by him/her.
20	The interpreter has the right to control any “speaker” as to the rate at which he/she shall speak.
21	The interpreter has the right, within the bounds of reasonableness, to determine how long he/she shall take in grasping and conveying an “idea”.
22	The interpreter has the right to ask that the “court record” be amended if he is satisfied that, on account of an error or omission on his/her part, the record is not correct.
23	The interpreter has the right to ask to be excused from interpreting (recuse himself) if he/she is satisfied that, in the interests of justice, such action is necessary.

Source: Hoffman (1994: 27-38)

From the 23 rules shown in Table 1 above, I analyse 13 of the rules in the following section. The analysis will seek to answer the research questions of the study which have already been indicated as:

- (a) To what extent do court interpreters follow the rules (presented above among others) prescribed by Hoffman's (1994) guidelines for court interpreters in Zimbabwe?
- (b) To what extent, and with what effect, do court interpreters in Zimbabwe act outside the rules prescribed by Hoffman's (1994) guidelines for court interpreters?
- (c) What implications do court interpreters' performance have on future training for court interpreters?

Rule 1: A court interpreter shall interpret faithfully, to the best of his/her ability and without fear, favour or prejudice.

Rule 1 above emphasises on "...to the best of..." the interpreter's ability rather than faithfulness, presumably because of the understanding that interpreters are liable to make errors and omissions. Although this rule seems to contradict the principle of accuracy (and hence best practices for court interpreting) on which court interpreting should be based, Hoffman stresses that interpreters should give every human being every right that the interpreter would claim for him/herself.

From the observation of cases and interviews with court interpreters, it was clear that this rule is the basis of the work of court interpreters in Zimbabwe and they all strive to satisfy this requirement during their interpretation.

Rule 3: The interpreter shall not himself/herself add to or enlarge on any statement made by a "speaker".

In terms of Rule 3 above, Hoffman emphasises that when a speaker answers a question in a single word, "Yes" or "No" for instance, the interpreter should not enlarge on this. The reason for this rule could be that a reply in the affirmative is not necessarily the same as an assertion if it were to be entered into the record. The rule therefore makes it imperative that interpreters should never add anything to an idea, not even by way of explanation, unless it is made clear that the explanation is the interpreter's and not the speaker's.

Rule 4: The interpreter shall not himself/herself put any question to any speaker, unless the answer to such question is necessary to enable the interpreter to grasp the "idea intended".

Rule 4 above forbids interpreters from either investigating a point on behalf of the prosecutor, accused or any other party, or from getting further information on their behalf. This means that interpreters are only allowed to put to the witness questions put to them by the questioner for interpretation. The only concessions to depart from this rule are for those questions which the interpreter may not have understood entirely.

Rule 5: The interpreter shall not himself/herself answer any question put by a speaker, unless the question was put to him/her directly to enable the listener to grasp the "intended idea".

According to this rule, when a witness seeks further information before answering the question put to him/her, it is not for the interpreter to answer that question by giving the information the witness requires, but to interpret it to the questioner. This means that even when the interpreter knows the answer or can supply the

information sought by the witness, he/she must not presume that he/she knows what is in the mind of the questioner. This rule, in short, demands that interpreters stick to their role i.e. interpreting so as to maintain their neutrality and invisibility (Hoffman, 1994).

Rule 6: The interpreter shall not himself/herself construct a “plea” from the remarks made by an accused. Rule 6 emphasises that it is not the interpreter’s responsibility to construct a plea from any remarks made by an accused when the charge is put to him/her. The rule reminds interpreters of their primary role, namely to interpret to the bench and remarks made by the accused. In terms of this rule, interpreters should not take it upon themselves to conclude whether it amounts to a plea of guilt or innocence. The interpreter thus bears the responsibility of interpreting everything the accused says in answer to the charge, instead of constructing a plea from what the accused says. Doing otherwise may result in a gross miscarriage of justice.

Rule 7: The interpreter shall either put to the witness in question form or interpret to the bench all remarks made by an accused when he is asked if he has any questions to put to the witness in cross-examination.

The above rule is primarily based on Hoffman’s (1994) observation that, for most ordinary people in Zimbabwean courts, court appearance is equal to making a statement rather than putting questions to the witness. When asked to cross-examine, most ordinary people reply “I have no questions to ask”. If and when they do attempt cross examination, they make statements rather than ask questions. It is the interpreter’s responsibility to ensure that everything said (in question or statement form) by the accused is interpreted to the bench without wasting the court’s time and prejudicing the accused.

Rule 9: The interpreter shall satisfy himself/herself that the accused can hear and understand everything that is said by a “speaker”.

The above rule could be regarded in part as one of the rules which spell out court interpreters’ non-interpreting roles- what Wadensjö (1998) refers to as coordinating roles which then casts doubt on the interpreters neutrality and invisibility) and thus as evidence of the centrality of the interpreter’s role in the success of the communication process in the courtroom (Hale, 2004, 2011). The rule emphasises the interpreter’s role in ensuring that the accused is afforded a fair trial by making sure that when a witness is giving evidence, he/she speaks out loudly and distinctly enough for the accused to hear. Where the interpreter has doubt as to whether or not the accused can follow the witness, he/she must inform the accused that if he/she cannot hear and follow what the witness is saying, he/she must not hesitate to inform the interpreter.

In terms of the same rule, the interpreter is also expected to speak loudly and distinctly enough for the accused to follow the interpreted version, thus enabling him/her to appreciate the significance of the answers given by the witness. Apart from this, Hoffman (1994: 32) further states that “If, on account of the technical nature of the evidence, illiteracy of the accused, or for any other reason, the interpreter cannot make the accused to grasp the idea intended by the speaker, the

interpreter should immediately inform the bench of the fact". The reason for this and the other precautions discussed under this rule is to ensure that interpreters do their utmost to give the accused an idea of the nature of the evidence for or against him/her.

Rule 10: The interpreter shall immediately inform the bench should he/she have any doubt as to whether a listener understands and appreciates a question or statement interpreted to him.

According to Hoffman (1994) and confirmed by practising interpreters during interviews with the researcher, some questions or statements are very difficult to interpret into indigenous languages, e.g. Shona. This is so because some English (legal) terms do not have Shona equivalents. Besides, some ordinary people do not grasp the intended idea as easily as others do. Although most judicial officers in Zimbabwe generally speak the languages of the witness or accused and are therefore in a position to judge for themselves whether a question or statement has been understood, it remains the interpreter's responsibility to place the judicial officers and the accused/witness in the same position as the interpreter and to inform the bench when the interpreter suspects that a listener has not understood and appreciated a question or statement.

Rule 12: The interpreter shall put all the "alternative charges" to an accused before asking him to plead.

This rule is probably a reaction to some practising interpreters I observed who are in the habit of putting the main charge to the accused and asking him/her to plead to the charge first and, should he/she plead guilty, they refrain from putting the alternative charges to him/her. When interpreters interpret the main charge only, the accused may be prejudiced when asked to plead to the main charge before the alternative charge and its meaning are put to him/her. For fairness, it is therefore essential that the accused should have all the alternative charges put to him/her before he/she is called upon to plead. This rule by Hoffman is very clear. The interpreter's responsibility (Hale, 2004) is premised on the provision of complete and accurate interpretations.

Rule 13: The interpreter shall not interpret any question, nor convey any idea, in such a manner that his interpretation amounts to a "leading question" or suggests an answer to the "listener".

The rule emphasises that interpreters should not change the form of the question by either constructing an interpreted version of a non-leading question in such a way that it suggests an answer to the question put, or by conveying the idea in the form of a leading question. Again, where interpreters experience difficulty in framing questions, particularly during cross-examination by the accused and the court, they should appeal to the bench for assistance.

Rule 15: The interpreter shall not omit or fail to interpret any part of any utterance because it is not understood by him/her, or because he/she thinks it should not be interpreted, unless he informs the bench of this omission.

Put simply, Rule 15 states that interpreters should interpret in full a speaker's utterances without making decisions about what is relevant/irrelevant. This means that every utterance is absolutely necessary for interpretation. In terms of this rule, Hoffman (1994: 34) emphasises the following: "Never omit or fail to interpret anything, for any reason whatever, unless you inform the bench of your omission". By this, Hoffman (1994) reminds interpreters of three issues: 1) the need to interpret everything transmitted to them; 2) the need to draw to the attention of the court of their inability to interpret anything through ignorance or misconception; and 3) never to take any chances as they may prejudice the case and mislead the court.

Rule 16: The interpreter shall immediately inform the bench when he has reason to believe that he/she has made an error or omission.

This rule is based on the common adage that *to err is human*. It is, therefore, unrealistic to expect interpreters to not make errors. During interviews with the researcher about their work, interpreters admitted that when an issue is further investigated in cross-examination, for instance, or after much more has been said, they sometimes realise that they have made a mistake or omitted part of an idea. In view of this common experience and Rule 16, once an interpreter realises he/she has made a mistake, he/she must immediately inform the bench of the fact and the circumstances. It is unethical on the part of interpreters to allow any party to bear the brunt of their mistake. Rule 16 therefore makes it clear that it is not weakness, but a responsibility, to admit that one has made a mistake.

Rule 17: The interpreter shall not interpret as having been uttered (by words) any "idea" made known to him/her by a sign, indication or demonstration.

During trials, including the few cases observed by the researcher, it is not uncommon to find speakers who use signs or indications as they communicate their ideas (Ndlovu, 2016). These signs, indications or demonstrations are part of the evidence and must be interpreted. In fact, the interpreters interviewed by the researcher considered these signs and indications as being far less confusing than an attempt to describe the intended idea in words. According to this rule, apart from their usual interpreting, interpreters should ask the court to view the indication, thereby placing the court in the same position as they are with regard to grasping and understanding the idea intended by the indication.

The rules for court interpreters in Zimbabwe examined above address a number of issues relating to court interpreting. The first is the issue of norms for court interpreting, particularly the conduit image (Roy, 2000; Swift, 2012) and the strong norm of interpreter neutrality which are often the basis of court interpreting and on which best practices for court interpreters are based in various parts of the world (Wadensjö, 1998 & Hale, 2011).

The second issue is about the strategies the interpreters may adopt when faced with an interpreting challenge. For example, the addition of information that is implicit in the source text, or the omission of irrelevant information, for instance during cross-examination of the witness by the accused. This strategy clearly shows that interpreters depart from the prescriptive conduit model and assume a more active

role in the communicative encounter in line with Wadensjö's (1998) interpreting as interaction notion. However, the rules examined seem to emphasise implicitly and explicitly that these additions and omissions have to be done in terms of the high priority given to accuracy as a norm for court interpreting. Finally, although most of the issues examined in the above rules generally pertain to court interpreting, some are relevant for the broader context of interpreting studies in general.

Conclusion

This article aimed at exploring whether court interpreting in Zimbabwe's courts of law facilitates communication between the speakers of the various languages who participate in trials as accused persons and witnesses. The investigation focused on the role and function of the court interpreter and the effectiveness of court interpreting as a form of language mediation. Though a careful analysis of Hoffman's (1994) *A Guide to Interpreting in Judicial Proceedings* which is the primary training manual for interpreters in Zimbabwe, the findings presented in this article reveal that, because court interpreters are mindful that their primary goal is to ensure that participants fully understand each other's communicative intentions, they sometimes depart from some of the rules prescribed in their handbook by adopting a strategy in which they convey renditions which would ensure that a speaker's communicative motive, and not only his/her actual words, is available to an end recipient.

By interpreting in that manner, the interpreters' renditions, as confirmed by my findings, support the expectation that court interpreters are always mindful of the need to convey the speakers' meaning in full. The study therefore makes a special contribution, from an African point of view, to the debate on interpreters' role perception by advocating a move towards a more holistic account of dialogue interpreting encounters in which all features are taken into account so that the interpreter's role is better appreciated. The recommendations the study makes on how various stakeholders can work with interpreters will ultimately enhance the quality of interpreting service provision to ensure that the rights of the people for whom they interpret are safeguarded. Although the findings of this study are based on data from Zimbabwean courtrooms, many of the issues raised in this study would be of interest to other interpreter-mediated courtrooms.

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