Research Ethics and Church Interpreting

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ABSTRACT: This article applies recent discussions of ethical aspects of Interpreting Studies to research on church interpreting. Lessons from this case study are then applied to field research on interpreting more broadly, with an emphasis on the specific ethical and methodological issues that arise when examining client expectations of interpreters. It begins with an examination of the concepts of informed consent and reputational risk as explored in the work of Elisabet Tiselius (2021, 2019), as well as the concept of positionality in the work of Chris Mellinger (2020). These ethical concepts are then applied to a critical reading of the research that focuses on locating problems and challenges of church interpreting and evaluating the performance of church interpreters (hereafter called PCE). This research, which began with the work of Adewuni Salawu (2010), sees the goal of research as improving the quality of church interpreting by offering an evaluation of the practice, using criteria created by each researcher. This tends to lead to arguments that church interpreting should be professionalized via training existing interpreters or replacing them with professionals. It is argued that research on PCE is ethically questionable, in light of recent discussions of research ethics, due to the selection of data and the placement of the researcher as the sole arbiter of interpreting quality. These choices lead inexorably to reputational risk for research participants. The paper then reflects on how researchers could engage in the evaluation of church interpreting more helpfully, if important modifications are made to the PCE. This then allows the wider relevance of these concerns to field research in Interpreting Studies to be discussed with a special emphasis on research seeking to understand client expectations of interpreters. In all cases, it is argued that the views and interests of those experiencing and delivering the interpreting must be foregrounded, even at the expense of restricting the research that can

take place. The results of refusing to do this will be the loss of access to research sites, broken trust with research participants, and ultimately, research that is theoretically and methodologically impoverished.

KEYWORDS: research ethics, informed consent, church interpreting, reputational risk, faith-related interpreting

논문초록: 본 연구는 통역학의 윤리적 측면에 대한 최근 논의를 교회통역에 적용한다. 이러한 사례연구에서 얻은 교훈은 다시 통역에 대한 현장연구에 보다 광범위하게 적용되며, 통역사에 대한 클라이언트의 기대수준을 검토할 때 발생하는 구체적인 윤리적, 방법론적 문제에 역점을 둔다. 본 연구는 엘리사벳 티셀리우스(Tiselius, 2021, 2019)가 탐구한 사전동의(informed consent) 및 평판 리스크(reputational risk)의 개념, 그리고 크리스 멜린저(Mellinger, 2020)가 논의한 위치성(positionality) 개념에 대한 검토로 시작한다. 이러한 윤리적 개념은 교회통역의 문제와 도전과제를 파악하고 교회통역사의 성과를 평가하는 데 초점을 맞춘 연구(이하 'PCE')에 대한 비판적 읽기에 다시 적용된다. 아데우니 살라우(Salawu, 2010)(2010)의 저작에서 출발한 본 연구는 각 연구자가 만든 기준을 사용하여 교회통역 관행에 대한 평가를 제시함으로써 교회통역의 수준을 개선하는 것을 연구의 목표로 삼는다. 이는 기존 통역사를 훈련하거나 전문인력으로 대체함으로써 교회통역을 전문화하여야 한다는 주장으로 이어지는 경향이 있다. 단, 연구윤리에 대한 최근 논의에서는 PCE의 윤리성에 대한 의문이 제기되고 있는데, 이는 데이터의 선별 방식, 그리고 통역 수준을 심판하는 유일한 주체가 연구자라는 점 때문이다. 이러한 선택은 연구 참여자들에 대한 평판 리스크를 유발할 수밖에 없다. 이에 본 연구는 PCE에 대한 중요한 수정이 이루어질 경우, 연구자들이 교회통역의 평가에 보다 도움이 되는 방향으로 참여할 수 있는 방안을 고찰한다. 이를 바탕으로 통역학 분야의 현장연구에 대한 이 같은 우려사항이 가지는 광범위한 관련성을 논의할 수 있으며, 이 과정에서는 통역사에 대한 클라이언트의 기대수준 파악을 모색하는 연구에 특별히 역점을 두게 된다. 어떤 경우든, 이루어질 수 있는 연구에 제한이 있더라도 통역을 경험하고 제공하는 이들의 관점과 이해관계를 반드시 전경화(foregrounding)하여야 한다. 이러한 방식을 거부하는 경우 연구 장소에 대한 접근권의 상실, 연구 참여자의 신뢰 훼손, 그리고 궁극적으로는 이론적, 방법론적으로 부실한 연구라는 결과를 초래하게 된다.

핵심어: 연구윤리, 사전동의, 교회통역, 평판 리스크, 신앙 관련 통역

1. Introduction

Since interpreting always involves people, the act of researching interpreting is always interpersonal. In field research, where researchers gather data at

authentic interpreted events, the interpersonal nature of interpreting research entails important methodological and ethical obligations on the part of the researcher. These include awareness of the researcher's position vis-à-vis the research subjects, the data they choose to include or exclude, and the ways that they use the power inherent in writing about the work of someone else. This article will examine how the research process and the reputation of those studied can be affected by a lack of reflection on the ethical obligations entailed in interpreting research. The specific case study of what can happen when researchers do not show awareness of these obligations will be a subset of research in the growing domain of church interpreting.

Research on interpreting in Christian churches has developed into distinct approaches (Downie, 2023). Early work in such contexts (Bearden, 1975; Sampley, 1990) concentrated on sign language interpreting and aimed to provide materials for training interpreters. Later, two approaches that sought to provide empirical accounts of church interpreting would emerge at around the same time. One of these was research on the relationship between church interpreting and the social and theological contexts in which it takes place. Such work built mostly upon the foundational writing of Vigouroux (2010) and Karlik (2010).

Independently of this, a second empirical approach developed, with the aim of evaluating the interpreting provided in churches through the lens of the challenges and problems faced by the interpreters. Articles in this approach show similarities with the paradigm-setting paper by Salawu (2010). This final approach, which will now be called the Problems, Challenges, and Evaluation (PCE) approach, is the focus of this paper.

It will be argued, based on the words of researchers themselves, that the PCE approach can be characterized by several key features. The first is that the research makes explicit reference to "problems", "challenges", or to some concept that is semantically similar to evaluating quality. Its second feature is that this focus leads to methodological prescriptivism, which sets church interpreting against some outside standard, rather than seeking to describe it as it takes place in a given context. This prescriptivism is an important methodological point of comparison between PCE and other forms of church interpreting research. The third feature of this research is that this focus on problems, challenges and evaluation leads researchers to view their role as that of an expert on how church interpreting can and should be professionalized. Indeed, all papers within PCE share the logic of the

identification of problems and challenges through prescriptivism with a view to professionalization.

In this light of recent discussions of research ethics and informed consent, it will be argued that the PCE approach is no longer ethically justifiable. Central to its methodology is the positioning of the researcher as the arbiter of interpreting quality, irrespective of the views or interests of those producing or receiving the interpreting. This runs counter to the prevailing accounts of quality in interpreting, which view it as a varied, and deeply social and negotiated variable, a view that leads to a requirement to research quality from multiple perspectives (see the summary in Pradas Macías & Zwischenberger, 2022, pp. 247-251). It also means that PCE cannot be viewed as an approach that seeks to build on the views of participants, as those views are typically absent or at least marginalized in some way.

Indeed, a key assumption in such research is that evaluation can continue with little to no regard to the wider social context in which the interpreting takes place. A comparison between PCE and more context-aware church interpreting research suggests that the differences in approaches within this small but growing niche within Interpreting Studies pose questions about what ethically sound interpreting research should look like.

Church interpreting research is a particularly apt field for this debate for several reasons. The first is that, while the subfield is large enough to have a dedicated bibliography—the *Bibliography of Interpreting in Christian Settings* (Downie & Furmanek, 2023)—it is still a relatively small field, with less than 100 publications listed. This means that trends and gaps are still able to be clearly identified and characterized, allowing for precise discussion of issues arising. This relatively small size also means that it can be used as a microcosm and testbed for wider debates in interpreting studies, following the example of a recent article that used it as a test application of Comparative Interpreting Studies (Downie, 2023).

This use of church interpreting research as a testbed and small-scale representation of wider patterns is also justified by the theoretical complexity of this sub-field. It has already proven fertile ground for the problematizing of established theoretical frameworks. This kind of problematization can be said to have begun with Vigouroux's (2010) rethinking of the performative aspect of interpreting, given the interpreter's dual role as respondent to the preaching and interpreter of the sermon in a church she studied in South Africa. Researchers would go on to use data from church interpreting to

question the validity of existing typologies of interpreted events (Hokkanen, 2012, pp. 296-299) and to probe and challenge the boundaries between professional and non-professional interpreting (De Tan et al., 2021; Hild, 2017; Karlik, 2010; Kinnamon, 2018). Despite its relatively small size, church interpreting research has already proven its worth as the source of important theoretical challenges.

In terms of its importance to research ethics, church interpreting exemplifies a very personal, emotionally resonant form of interpreting, with largely monologic modes and practices more reminiscent of conference interpreting. It is common for users of church interpreting to require personal commitment on the part of the interpreter (Balci Tison, 2016, pp. 141-143; Downie, 2016, p. 154) precisely because the interpreting is deemed to have symbolic and theological significance beyond the linguistic task of the interpreter (Hild, 2017, p. 191; Vigouroux, 2010, pp. 344-345). Matters of research ethics are therefore particularly pertinent in church interpreting as research in this area involves the examination of a practice with deep personal, symbolic, and religious significance to those participating. Examining these practices without an awareness of their wider significance leads inexorably to misleading or even damaging findings.

The need to understand the wider significance of church interpreting is an important factor in understanding the ethical implications of PCE. Before the analysis of PCE, however, it is important to reflect on recent discussions of interpreting research ethics.

2. The Ethics of Researcher Positionality

Recent work in Interpreting Studies has sought to understand what the specific ethical requirements are of researchers in this field. This is a pressing concern since most interpreting researchers are themselves interpreters and all data-driven research relies on the goodwill of other interpreters and the people with whom they work. In the first place, recent articles by Tiselius on the ethical position of the researcher (Tiselius, 2019) and on the importance of informed consent (Tiselius, 2021) have foregrounded the power that researchers wield when they do research.

The former of these papers is built around the assertion that "the position of the researcher is ethically crucial in all types of interpreting

research involving interpreters as participants" (Tiselius, 2019, p. 749). Thus, the researcher's position vis-à-vis the study participants and vis-à-vis their own status as an interpreter form vital considerations in the conduct of research (Tiselius, 2019, p. 748). At the core of this is the understanding that:

> Participants trust researchers with information which may be private and personal or otherwise important for the individual. The decision of how this information is handled and analyzed often depends on the researcher's discretionary power. When this power is ill exercised, the decisions risk breaching the trust of the participant. By allowing the researcher to study and share this information, the individual participants trust the researcher not to spread that information and not to let any harm happen to them. (Tiselius, 2019, p. 751)

Of course, interpreting research rarely risks bodily harm to participants but there is a risk of reputational harm. Information shared about interpreter performance can affect the reputation of an interpreter among their peers and their impression of their own abilities, especially in small interpreting communities where anonymity cannot be guaranteed, due to small amounts of information possibly being enough to identify a participant (Tiselius, 2021, pp. 89-91). This limits the effectiveness of anonymization as a strategy for reducing reputational harm.

This possibility of harm is one factor behind Tiselius' second paper, which takes up the issue of informed consent. Informed consent is seen as being based on three conditions: "intentionality, understanding and noncontrol" (Tiselius, 2021, p. 87). The author therefore says that informed consent must not involve any deception and must allow the participant to understand what will be done with their data before they agree to hand it over. More than an exercise in bureaucracy, informed consent is read as a relational contract between the researcher and participants. In return for participation in the study, the researcher agrees to be open about the purposes of data collection and what will be done with the data.

Awareness of and engagement with the views of participants is therefore an ethical imperative in church interpreting research since such interpreting is especially sensitive to those involved. Researchers in such settings must therefore consider the interests of those involved and ensure that their voices are heard. Indeed, to refuse to do this is to break trust with the research

participants, given the risk of reputational harm to the interpreters and the church.

With such ethical imperatives in mind, it is now useful to examine PCE. To ensure that similar considerations are given to researchers in this area as scholars recommend be given to research participants, as far as possible, the concerns and decisions of PCE will be examined using the words of the researchers involved, before a discussion of their ethical importance.

3. PCE in Its Own Words

It would be unfair to criticize PCE for not addressing issues that are outside of its scope. It is therefore helpful to start with the opening words of the first paper to use this approach, to clarify the typical scope and aims of PCE research.

> This work investigates and evaluates the efficiency and effectiveness of religious interpretation in Yoruba speaking areas of Nigeria. The study focused on only religious gatherings that make use simultaneously of English and Yoruba languages to communicate the message of God to the worshippers. The objective of the study is to investigate and evaluate the quality of the output through a questionnaire distributed to members of the spiritual congregations. The level of professional competence in the interpreter will also be investigated. (Salawu, 2010, p. 129)

The author sets the aims as the evaluation of the "efficiency and effectiveness" or, "quality" of the interpreting produced and of the "professional competence" of the interpreter. This suggests a user-centered approach to such evaluation. Yet, while the paper sets out a user-centered approach, the voice of the researcher prevails and the voice of users is marginalized. Following the result that 32 of the 50 people questioned supported "interpretation and translation into Yoruba because it allows understanding and easy spread of the gospel in Yorubaland" (Salawu, 2010, p. 131), the author responds that:

> The preference, irrespective of the form, is nothing but an acknowledgement of the theory of dynamic equivalence of Eugene Nida, thus rejecting the fact

that adaptation during interpretation may dilute the spiritual content of the Holy Book. (Salawu, 2010, pp. 131-132).

This statement makes several claims that do not receive explicit support from the data or literature review and reflects a position, evident throughout the study, that the researcher knows more than the research subjects. This leads to twin assertions that stand as the basic assumptions of all PCE research.

Despites the delicacy and sensitivity of the gospel interpretation, leaders in the spiritual gatherings in Nigeria, are yet to have a prise de conscience of the fact that professional interpreters should be employed to do the job of interpretation. The more the interpreter is exposed to modern equipments and training for the profession, the more the quality of his work. (Salawu, 2010, p. 133, grammar and emphasis as in original.)

In Salawu's work, churches are therefore expected to swap from using those who are "not trained interpreters" (Salawu, 2010, p. 132) to working with professionals. This view that untrained church interpreters should be replaced by professionals or that church interpreting should be professionalized is foundational for all PCE research. The second is that this professionalization will improve the interpreting as professionally trained interpreters produce better results than untrained church interpreters. No direct link is drawn between this conclusion and the answers given by respondents.

Biamah came to a similar conclusion by adding the analysis of transcribed data to a survey approach to elucidate the "communication challenges" (Biamah, 2013, p. 148) in interpreting in churches in Kenya. After recounting the percentages of the interpreter population who said they would adopt specific solutions when they did not understand what the preacher said, Biamah presented examples of interpreter output and remarked that:

The faithful bore the brunt by not getting the intended message as the interpreter would break the chain of communication by repeating the same difficult word or phrase . . . From this example, it is clear that the interpreter could neither understand nor interpret the phrase . . . The faithful therefore could not get the intended message. (Biamah, 2013, pp. 150-151)

In both cases, the researcher provides explanations of the effects or cause of interpreter output, without providing explicit data to justify them. Indeed, later in the paper the opinions of "30% of six faithful" (Biamah, 2013, p. 152) were cited as evidence that an interpreter's word choice had led to misunderstanding. Perceived results of the interpreter's decisions therefore seem to be as much derived from the researcher's own analysis as they are from the views of the intended addressees. There is little engagement with the interpreters on their decision-making processes. In this light, attributing certain decisions to the "interpreter's carelessness" (Biamah, 2013, p. 155) seems premature.

Like Salawu (2010, p. 133), Biamah also concludes that the correct course of action is for church interpreting to be professionalized, in this case through specialized training from language schools and theology training institutions (Biamah, 2013, p. 157). This recommendation forms part of a wider rhetorical positioning of the researcher as the expert who can and should prescribe to churches how and by whom interpreting should be provided.

A call for professionalization can also be found in the work of Musyoka and Karanja (2014, p. 206). In this case, data analysis leans towards describing the difficulties the interpreters faced rather than in criticizing them. What is still present, however, is the position of the researcher as one equipped to judge the success or comprehensibility of the service provided. Note, for example, the recurrence of phrases such as "the output thus rendered the message incorrectly" and "the meaning is distorted" (Musyoka & Karanja, 2014, p. 202). The standard held by the researcher, and not that of the audience, remains the standard against which the interpreting is judged.

This is all the more striking given that the term *professional interpreting* is rarely, if ever defined in PCE research. Salawu's aforementioned call for professionalization (Salawu, 2010, p. 133) comes without any definition of what a professional interpreter is. Biamah similarly presents a definition of interpreting as "a communication bridge between the speaker of the source language and the audience who understands the second language" (Biamah, 2013, p. 196) but does not lay out how such work is affected by training or professionalization. Likewise, Musyoka and Karanja make a very similar call for training and professionalization (Musyoka & Karanja, 2014, p. 206) without any definitions as to the purpose or content of such training. In an article that shares the central assumptions of the PCE approach, Mlundi does provide a brief account of how parts of interpreting professionalized (Mlundi, 2021,

pp. 296-297) but does not explain what professionalization means nor how it relates to the "quality criteria" (Mlundi, 2021, p. 297) found in one particular reference or how these relate to other, more experimentally derived criteria (see Chiaro & Nocella, 2004; Collados Aís et al., 2003).

3.1 Researcher Position in PCE

The above examples, though distinct in their methods, represent the same underlying approach. Data gathered from interpreters or other participants is compared to the standards held by the researcher. Failures to adhere to these standards are then taken as evidence that the churches should change how they offer interpreting.

The same pattern can be found across almost all PCE research. In Makha and Phafoli (2019), the authors seek to identify instances of "omissions, additions and misinterpretation" (Makha & Phafoli, 2019, p. 156) in the work of interpreters in five churches in Lesotho. All three are viewed as "distortions of meaning" (Makha & Phafoli, 2019, p. 152) and thus taken as flawed interpreting. The researchers then present isolated instances of each of these distortions with commentary on what they believe would have been a better way to interpret (Makha & Phafoli, 2019, pp. 157-159). This is followed by a view as to why these distortions took place, grounded mostly in a claimed lack of linguistic competence and unfamiliarity with what the researchers deem to be professional norms (Makha & Phafoli, 2019, pp. 159-162). This leads to the conclusion that the performance of church interpreters could be improved if they were trained to be more like professional interpreters (Makha & Phafoli, 2019, p. 162).

It is possible, however, to view such findings as a useful outcome of research, with the arrival of researchers as experts to evaluate interpreting and offer an informed opinion on improvements leading to improvements in the interpreting itself. Indeed, PCE research has been framed as an attempt to improve the quality of interpreting (see Musyoka & Karanja, 2014, p. 206; Salawu, 2010, p. 133). The researcher therefore moves from being an observer to becoming the arbiter and improver of interpreting performance. For this logic to work, however, it would have to be shown that the opinions of researchers are empirically and theoretically justified and that their recommendations align with the needs of the participants in the interpreting context. One recent PCE article provides evidence that any claims to that end are questionable.

The article by De Tan et al. (2021) focused on the views of six church interpreters in Malaysia. While recorded and transcribed data is said to have been collected (De Tan et al., 2021, p. 58), it is mentioned only rarely in the data analysis. Instead, interview responses on interlinguistic (De Tan et al., 2021, pp. 59-61, 64-65), meta-linguistic (De Tan et al., 2021, pp. 61-62), and social and cultural issues (De Tan et al., 2021, pp. 62-63) are presented and analyzed. This paper therefore presents the views of the interpreters without the explicit value judgments found in other PCE research. Following their analysis of the interpreters' responses, the authors conclude:

> This indicates that non-professional church interpreters are able to perform overtime cognitive abilities of professional interpreters despite not undergoing interpreting training, which points to questioning the need for professional interpreting in religious setting. It may be premature to question the level of performance professional interpreters are capable of in comparison to non-professionals, more research is needed to substantiate this audacious claim. (De Tan et al., 2021, p. 70)

Instead of starting with a pre-defined standard, the choice to foreground the views of interpreters allowed the researchers to analyze their performance through the interpreters' own perspective (see the discussion of the interpreters' grammatical competence on p. 63, for example). Thus, the researchers did not assume to know what was challenging about church interpreting. They were then able to uncover how the interpreters looked to meet the challenges they faced (De Tan et al., 2021, pp. 67-69), details that are missing in earlier PCE research. It is telling that this information on how interpreters met these challenges immediately preceded the conclusion that the need for professionalization of the form discussed in other PCE research was not supported by the data (De Tan et al., 2021, p. 70).

3.2 Summary of the Foundational Claims of PCE

Reading PCE research therefore shows that researchers have tended to create their own standards, against which they compared the data they generated. Until De Tan et al. (2021), such comparisons led to the conclusion that church interpreting was somehow deficient and had to be professionalized. Professionalization, while never explicitly defined, tended to either mean

that church interpreters should undergo training to conform to what the *researchers* believed was expected of professional interpreters or that all church interpreting should be provided by professionals. By prioritizing the views of the interpreters, De Tan et al. (2021) demonstrated that prior findings were a product of the preconceptions of the researchers.

The differences in findings could be geographically determined, with the backgrounds of church interpreters in Malaysia possibly differing from those in the African contexts discussed in earlier PCE research. Yet the prominence of the voice of the researcher in the PCE articles that denigrated the work of church interpreters cannot be ignored as a factor in the conclusions reached. In addition, the tendency to isolate excerpts without recourse to wider social context allows greater scope for the performance of interpreters to be judged negatively.

The isolated nature of the excerpts discussed in PCE research also makes it difficult to know how typical they are of the performance of the interpreters. Within a wider framework of looking for challenges and problems, the emphasis will always be on poor performance rather than on noting when the interpreters have done well. It is thus difficult to estimate how frequently interpreters face the challenges or problems the researchers found. This suggests that this research approach skews analysis towards the negative aspects of interpreter performance without any specific space to understand how important these negative aspects are or how often they occur.

It is, of course, not justifiable to argue that this meant that the conclusions of most PCE research were pre-defined before data were gathered. Yet the act of setting the researcher as the expert evaluator and the focus on the negative aspects of interpreter performance do make it difficult to imagine how the interpreting could have been viewed favorably. By stripping utterances of social context and exalting the researcher, PCE creates a space where it is very difficult for the researcher's initial assumptions to be problematized. This decision to set the researcher as the sole arbiter lies at the heart of the ethical and positional problems in PCE, problems which merit examination in their own right.

3.3 Ethical and Positional Problems in PCE

It is fair to say that a defining characteristic of PCE research is that the voice of the researcher is prominent, to the point of being dominant. What is not so prominent is any clarity as to the processes the researcher(s) went through to secure access to the data site and to the research participants. While there are no explicit mentions of any such informed consent procedures in PCE articles, absence of evidence should not be read as evidence of absence. Instead, what matters in this case is that PCE seems to violate the principles of informed consent by creating a research approach in which the risks of harm to interpreters and churches are high while the chance of positive outcomes is low. The approach is ethically questionable simply because, in the pursuit of challenges and problems as a basis for evaluation, researchers deliberately seek out information that is likely to harm participants.

What kind of interpreter would consent to research that will lead to them being labeled "careless" (Biamah, 2013, p. 155) or as someone who "distorted" meaning (Musyoka & Karanja, 2014, p. 202)? Worse still, how can interpreters be expected to trust research that comes to the conclusion that church leaders should have a "prise de conscience" (Salawu, 2010, p. 133) and remove them from their position? Although these quotes come from earlier PCE research, the same underlying arguments remain even in the more recent work of Mlundi (2021), whose claims that interpreters did not meet the criteria set for them, without a presentation of relevant evidence.

The lack of clear definitions in PCE creates a positionality that is entirely one-sided. With no clear definition of what a 'professional interpreter' is, it is impossible to know how church interpreting could be deemed to be of equal value to it. PCE therefore creates a space where it is very difficult for the researcher's initial assumptions to be problematized. By setting out to find 'challenges' or 'problems' and setting the voice of interpreters as solely a voice to be critiqued, PCE robs itself of the possibility of offering a fair basis for evaluation. Put simply, the position of the researcher as expert leads to the ethical problem that the research can only ever do harm to the research subjects, especially as they are largely left without a voice.

The ethical issue with PCE is not therefore that the researcher's voice is clear but that it tends to predominate over all other voices with no theoretical or methodological possibilities for checks or contradictions. The voice of the researcher dominates to the point of proffering explanations of

interpreter decisions with scant evidence for such assertions. As a result, the contributions of other participants and their views are subject to criticism and judgment, without any real recourse. While it is true that the voice of the researcher is always present in research, even in this present article, it is important to note that this voice does not always take the position of unimpeachable expert.

It remains the case that PCE research can take place without the clear ethical issues demonstrated above. An instructive demonstration of this is the work of De Tan et al. (2021). As mentioned above, the views of those involved in the interpreting are given as much, if not more, importance than the views of researchers. It is worth noting that this was the only PCE study that concluded that professionalization was not necessary. It would seem entirely possible then that calls for professionalization in PCE research resulted less from the research data available than from the ethical and methodological positions taken by the researchers. Further evidence that the positionality and resulting ethical issues found in much of PCE were never inevitable can be found in comparing it with context-aware church interpreting research. It is to this comparison that this article will now turn.

4. PCE and Context-aware Church Interpreting Research

The previous section sought to link the positioning of researchers as interpreter evaluators, the focus on negative aspects of interpreter performance, and the tendency towards arguing that church interpreting needed to be professionalized. As the work of De Tan et al. (2021) did not contain analyses of transcriptions of interpreter performance, the question remains as to how such performance could be analyzed without the assumption that doing so involves evaluation.

One study that drew connections between the context of church interpreting and interpreter performance was that of Rayman (2007), who examined the work of a sign language interpreter at the opening ceremony of a building shared by a deaf church and a hearing church in the USA. In that case, the researcher noted that, while the sermon from a deaf preacher contained an explicit differentiation between the hearing and deaf communities (Rayman, 2007, pp. 81-82, 84), the interpreter deliberately and systematically deleted this, using the word "we" when the deaf pastor had

separated the two groups with his body and sign positioning (Rayman, 2007, pp. 93-96).

Rayman viewed such deletions as the realization of competing views of deaf culture (Rayman, 2007, pp. 84-87) and differing opinions on the relationship between deaf and hearing people as viewed by the preacher and interpreter (Rayman, 2007, pp. 96-98). Such an argument was possible as the researcher had integrated knowledge of the history of the deaf and hearing church groups attending the service into their analysis (Rayman, 2007, pp. 73-74). There is therefore a movement from the contextualization of interpreting to a descriptive approach to interpreter decisions and from that approach to explanatory theorization as to why such decisions occurred.

A similar move from description of social context to description and explanation of interpreter decisions is found in the work of Karlik (2010), who discussed interpreted Scripture readings in local churches in The Gambia. She contextualized the interpreters' tendency towards explicitation, including the repetition of verb subjects, the switch from simple to auxiliary verbs, and the insertion of additional cohesion (Karlik, 2010, pp. 172-173) within the social context of the church. Thus, these additions are not viewed as errors (cf. Makha & Phafoli, 2019, p. 156) but as attempts to produce oral performances that reflect "the audience's expectation of natural-sounding, easy-to-follow presentation" (Karlik, 2010, p. 172). While Karlik does still conclude that training would be useful, given the difficulties in finding local equivalents for key biblical terms (Karlik, 2010, p. 182), she imagines that as something delivered by the churches to develop the skills of those already working in them.

For both Rayman (2007) and Karlik (2010), the social and organizational context of the interpreting provided the lens through which decisions were examined. This led to an understanding of these decisions that contrast with the ones presented in PCE. The article that most clearly illuminates how the conclusions of PCE research are a product of researcher position is, however, Vigouroux's study of interpreting in a church in South Africa attended by migrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Vigouroux, 2010).

Vigouroux's study contains interpreter behaviors that share much in common with the patterns found in PCE research. Like Biamah (2013, p. 151), Vigouroux showed instances where the interpreter omitted important information in their target text (Vigouroux, 2010, p. 351). Like Musyoka and Karanja (2014, p. 203), Vigouroux found that the elicitation of audience

responses by the preacher made the work of the interpreter more challenging (Vigouroux, 2010, pp. 352-353). Like several later PCE researchers (Biamah, 2013; Makha & Phafoli, 2019; Musyoka & Karanja, 2014), Vigouroux also argued that the decisions of interpreters can reduce the impact of interpreting (Vigouroux, 2010, p. 356). Vigouroux did not, however, reach the same conclusions regarding the need for professionalization.

Rather than seeing professionalization as the cure for the problems of church interpreting Vigouroux locates this interpreting within three key aspects of church life. The first was the vision of the leaders of the church, in which reaching Africans from across the continent was central (Vigouroux, 2010, p. 344). The second aspect is the geographical location of the church in South Africa and the desire of the leaders that the church fit into its local community, which necessitated interpreting into English, even though everyone in the church spoke French and Lingala (Vigouroux, 2010, p. 356). These two led to the third aspect, which was the use of interpreting as the performance of the vision of the church, even if this interpreting was not yet able to function adequately for those who did not speak French (Vigouroux, 2010, pp. 347, 349).

What appeared to be omissions, additions, and misinterpretation made sense within the vision of the church. Judged under the assumptions of PCE, the interpreting delivered in the church studied by Vigouroux (2010) would have looked like it did not meet the standards of good interpreting. Placed within the context of the church that commissioned it, the same interpreting takes on performative and symbolic importance.

4.1 Social Context as a Methodological Imperative

The two approaches therefore come to very different conclusions from similar data. If the work of De Tan et al. (2021) is viewed as the midpoint between PCE and context-aware research, it appears that the conclusions depend on the breadth of data analyzed. Isolated excerpts, viewed through the lens of the researcher as evaluator and the quest to find problems, lead inexorably to the view that the interpreting is flawed. Similar excerpts, viewed in the contexts of the churches for whom they were produced and through the lens of researchers seeking to understand and elevate the voices of research subjects, are viewed as reflecting the concerns and priorities of those in the church.

It is not therefore that the contrast between PCE and context-aware

interpreting research lies simply in the research questions posed. It is instead that PCE tends to ignore or minimize the kinds of data that would allow researchers to understand the nature of the challenges and problems they find. Only such contextualization, the very contextualization that is common in context-aware research, offers an ethical basis for evaluation.

Understanding the problems caused by the narrowness of the data in PCE has wider implications. It poses difficulties for work arguing for the professionalization of church interpreters but using different arguments than are commonly found in PCE. The work of Mlundi, for example, sought to understand "the criteria for measuring quality in church interpretation in Tanzania" (Mlundi, 2021, p. 295), while examining moves towards professionalization. The underlying argument was that professionalism was to be attained by matching the quality criteria found in the article. Using data from interviews, focus groups and questionnaires among 60 respondents, the researcher looked to provide an aggregated account of the criteria used and found that these were "Congruence (C), Faithfulness (F), Fluency (F), Spirituality (S), Grammar (G), Biblical Terms (B), Flexibility (F), Vocabulary (V), Completeness (C), and Cultural Expression (C)" (Mlundi, 2021, p. 299). Thus far, the researcher seems to have offered an approach that is attuned to the contexts in which church interpreting takes place, here specifically in terms of the expectations audience members have of it.

Yet the problem of narrow data arises here in a different way, namely that, while the meanings of these terms are shown to be contested in the data, they are presented in the article as if they were homogenous. For example, definitions of "congruence" covered invisibility, neutrality, mirroring the preacher and resembling the preacher, even in dress (Mlundi, 2021, pp. 300-301). It is not hard to see that these do not represent the same coherent construct, with neutrality being at odds with mirroring or resembling the preacher. Likewise, views of "faithfulness" ranged from the ability to "bring out the meaning the way it was intended by the preacher" (Mlundi, 2021, p. 301) to providing clear and complete interpretation, and offering "interpreting which is not literal" (Mlundi, 2021, p. 302). These definitions range from mind reading to the need to represent the entirety of what was said, even if a clear and complete interpretation will include meanings not intended by the preacher.

The researcher does admit that "their concept of faithfulness depended on the type of participant" (Mlundi, 2021, p. 301) but the significance of this

admission is not pursued. Indeed, such inter-subject variability casts doubt on the validity of the view that there was such a thing as an agreed set of criteria in church interpreting, even just among the respondents to this single research project. In this light, the researcher's claim that "it was agreed that the purpose of the interpretation is to render a faithful interpretation" (Mlundi, 2021, p. 309) is incongruous due to the lack of qualifications or reservations. Subsequent claims that the criteria were not met and that professional training should then be implemented (Mlundi, 2021, pp. 309-310) become substantially weaker in the light of the contested nature of these criteria. Interpreters cannot be expected to adhere to criteria that are internally contradictory.

Viewing these criteria as internally consistent enables a simple argument that, since they look like those found in research in professional interpreting, church interpreting should look like professional interpreting. This allows a pretense of objectivity that makes professionalization of the kind intended by the researcher the inevitable conclusion.

Conversely, if the internal contradictions in Mlundi's (2021, p. 299) key criteria are acknowledged, then the fact that similar problems with such criteria have long been known in research on client expectations of professional interpreting (Diriker, 2004; Eraslan, 2011) means that conclusions on the need for professionalization cannot be so neat. Acknowledging the complexity of the social contexts in which church interpreting takes place necessitates a re-evaluation of its relationship with professional interpreting, however the latter is defined.

The comparison of PCE and context-aware approaches does not show that the former is flawed while the latter is not. It does, however, strongly suggest that discussing challenges and problems without discussing the social context in which they arise, including the purpose and aims of the interpreting, leads to skewed results. This view is not just relevant to church interpreting but has wider applications across all fieldwork in Interpreting Studies.

5. Applying Ethical Principles Beyond Church Interpreting—A Simple Example

It would be a mistake to view this debate as only having relevance to church interpreting research or as some kind of one-sided critique. On the contrary, its close links with recent discussions of research ethics suggest wider relevance to interpreting studies. The dangers of PCE are the dangers of any research that seeks to explain authentic interpreting through the lens of prescriptive pronouncements, researcher preferences or pre-set assumptions about the right criteria to use. Any field research that does not give a voice to those participating in the interpreted event is at risk of making ethically questionable assumptions or using methods that skew findings by eliding important explanatory data.

It should be accepted, in this regard, that centering the voices of participants may lead to researchers having to reconsider their initial questions. Questions that risk harm to participants and those to which they did not or cannot grant informed consent would be eliminated. While it is true that this puts limits on academic freedom, the alternative is ongoing breach of trust between researchers and those whose consent we need to do research. The author of this present paper is already aware of a church that has closed its doors to visits from researchers, precisely because of its perception of historic poor practices.

It should also be added that the labeling of interpreters as "careless" (Biamah, 2013, p. 155) or as someone who "distorted" meaning (Musyoka & Karanja, 2014, p. 202), is hardly likely to build trust among them for future research projects of even among church interpreters in general. Likewise, the stream of PCE that defines "professionalization" as the replacement of those currently interpreting will hardly gain the trust and cooperation of those interpreters. It is hardly in the interest of those interpreters to cooperate with research that views them losing their status as a positive outcome. It is no exaggeration to state that the goal of PCE research is antithetical to the interests of the very interpreters upon whose output it relies.

If limiting research to questions that entail partnership and informed consent means reducing the risk of more research sites becoming off-limits and of more potential participants refusing to take part, this can only be of benefit to researchers and research more broadly. Conversely, pursuing research that reflects the voices and concerns of all participants will make

it easier to enlist participants and so lead to more research done more effectively. An initial setting of ethical limits opens doors for research that can explore areas that are only open to those who have won trust.

This does not mean that researchers should be ethically bound to take all church interpreting or indeed any interpreting as perfect. Nor does it prevent criticism of unhelpful practices. It does, however, mean that researchers do need to understand the potential for harm in their research and ensure a voice for those involved in the interpreting. In line with the approach recommended by Turner and Harrington (2000), research should be "on, for, and with" research participants, acknowledging the importance of their interests and, wherever possible, giving them a voice in the direction of research and the interpretation of results.

It is impossible to do this while retaining any paternalistic views as to the purpose of research. Indeed, taking on board concerns about the ethical position of the researcher, the need for truly informed consent and the kinds of participative research sought by Turner and Harrington (2000) means abandoning wholesale the idea of research as a solo or purely academic endeavor. If evaluation of any interpreting is to be done, then this must be done in partnership with and overtly for those who experience the interpreting. It is their interpreting, not ours.

This need to ensure the end of paternalistic research and the foregrounding of participant voices represents a place where an issue that would initially appear internal to church interpreting research has wider applications. Places where interpreting involves those with specific vulnerabilities or where interpreting is part of wider power imbalances offer similarly important sites for the consideration of research ethics. For this reason, further applications of these ideas in medical interpreting, legal interpreting, and interpreting in asylum contexts would be useful. Given the aims of PCE and its focus on a certain view of evaluation, it is, however, worth reflecting on how the ethical concerns expressed in this article should be reflected in research on client expectations of interpreters, given the importance of such work in discussions of interpreting quality (see e.g., Kurz, 2001; Mack & Cattaruzza, 1995).

5.1 An Application of Research Ethics to Client Expectation Research

A straightforward application of this respondent-centered approach can be found in the ongoing research on client expectations of interpreters, especially when this involves surveys (for a review of such work, see Downie, 2015). While established instruments exist for examining client expectations before an event takes place, often closely related to the one created by Bühler (1986), the use of such instruments assumes that the criteria are sound. Yet later research by Mack and Cattaruzza (1995) argued that the criteria used in such research were not well-defined. Likewise, Diriker (2004) found that, while all the audience members she interviewed agreed that the top quality criteria was to "convey the meaning of the speakers' speeches", there was no agreement between respondents as to what this meant (pp. 75-77).

This lack of agreement as to the meaning of different terms used in client expectations surveys problematizes the practice of referring uncritically to criteria, such as accuracy or impartiality (on the latter see Downie, 2017), that we might assume have fixed, universal meanings. In short, researchers cannot make strong claims about concepts that lack clear and universal definitions. This is especially the case in the light of the work of the group led by Collados Aís (e.g., Collados Aís, 1998; Collados Aís et al., 2007), which produced experimental evidence suggesting that criteria overlap and affect each other in ways not anticipated in client surveys. This is reflected in the doctoral work of Eraslan (2011), who found that respondents' views of how interpreters should act depended on whether they were asked about interpreting in general or interpreting at their specific event.

It would seem then that the quest for universal quality criteria for interpreting runs up against the problem of ensuring that these criteria are well-defined in ways that reflect the understandings of both the researcher and the respondents (on this difficulty, compare the conclusions of Diriker (2004) to Mlundi (2021)). In addition, the creation of universal criteria would also mean ensuring that their definitions and operationalizations do not differ between studies of expectations of interpreting in general, interpreting at a specific event, and experimental studies. It seems highly unlikely that respondents from different geographical, social, and linguistic backgrounds will have identical definitions of a given set of criteria, especially since research so far has failed to find such consistency within individual events.

Resolving the definitional issues of client expectations research and the

ethical issues with PCE would entail centering the voices of respondents, as is being done in research on the views of children on working with interpreters (Amato & Mack, 2021). Instead of arriving with pre-set criteria, researchers would do well to begin by examining what the interpreting means for the respondents, how and why organizations are using it, and their views of its effectiveness. Not only is this more ethically sound, but it also has clear theoretical benefits as it could reveal unforeseen patterns in expectations and views among different respondents within different samples. This would begin to answer the key question within the growing sub-field of Comparative Interpreting Studies (Downie, 2021; Tyulenev & Zheng, 2017) as to which factors are theoretically important differentiators across different interpreting contexts.

The way towards ethically sound PCE research shares much in common with solving the definitional issue in client expectations research. In both cases, the way forward is to center the voices of those participating in the interpreting and decenter as much as possible the voice of the researcher. Adopting the positions put forward by Turner and Harrington (2000) and accepting the importance of informed consent (Tiselius, 2021) are not just good ethical practices but basic ingredients in the theoretical and methodological soundness of any field study.

6. Conclusion

This article discussed the Problems, Challenges and Evaluation (PCE) approach to church interpreting research. It was argued, in the light of recent development in Interpreting Studies research ethics, that such research contains important ethical flaws as its methodology is skewed towards results that will lead to reputation harm on participants, while not offering them a voice. This was illustrated through an examination of PCE research in the words of those involved in the approach and in contrast with church interpreting research that looks to explicitly include an analysis of social context. In addition, the lack of clear definitions was also claimed to create a space where the researcher was an unimpeachable expert, whose pre-existing conclusions were not open to challenge.

More fruitful approaches of research were discussed and related to the ongoing definitional issues found in client expectations research across the

field of Interpreting Studies. While the PCE approach may be presently confined to church interpreting, it points to subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which research methods and findings, alongside ethical decisions, can be affected by the presuppositions researchers bring to their work. This makes it all the more important for researchers to create space for the voices of research participants to be heard and for their interests to be viewed as important.

While this may seem to place a limit on academic freedom in the short term, without this change, research may end up becoming self-limiting, as participants refuse to take part. Centering the voices of research subjects is therefore an exercise in academic responsibility as well as a potential source of methodological and theoretical enrichment.

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