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## CROSS-CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNITY INTERPRETING

### МІЖКУЛЬТУРНІ ВИМІРИ ГРОМАДСЬКОГО ПЕРЕКЛАДУ

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Community interpreting plays a crucial role in ensuring equitable access to public services for linguistically and culturally diverse populations. However, the interpreting process extends far beyond the transfer of linguistic content. Community interpreters frequently operate at the intersection of multiple cultural frameworks, navigating differences in communication styles, social norms, values, and expectations. These cross-cultural dynamics substantially influence the accuracy, clarity, and effectiveness of interpreted interactions. Despite the growing recognition of the interpreter's role as a cultural mediator, research on the specific cross-cultural dimensions that shape community interpreting remains fragmented. Existing studies often focus either on linguistic aspects of interpreting or on general intercultural communication without sufficiently integrating the two fields. This gap becomes particularly significant in multicultural societies, where communication failures rooted in cultural misunderstanding can lead to misdiagnoses, compromised access to justice, or ineffective delivery of social support. The purpose of this study is to examine the cross-cultural dimensions that shape the practice of community interpreting and to determine how cultural factors influence communication outcomes in multilingual public-service settings. Key findings reveal that cultural factors, such as communication styles, social hierarchies, values, and context-specific norms, significantly influence interpreter-mediated communication, often leading to challenges and misunderstandings. Interpreters employ a variety of strategies to manage these issues, including clarifying ambiguous terms, providing brief cultural explanations, and adjusting communication style. The effectiveness of these communicative and mediation strategies is closely tied to intercultural competence, which allows interpreters to recognize implicit cultural cues, navigate value conflicts, and maintain neutrality while facilitating understanding. In conclusion, the study affirms that community interpreting is a complex interaction shaped profoundly by cultural variables. Intercultural competence emerges as a fundamental factor in interpreter effectiveness. Incorporating intercultural competence, psycholinguistic awareness, and scenario-based practice into educational programs can significantly enhance interpreters' ability to manage culturally complex interactions and improve communication outcomes across healthcare, legal, economic, and social service settings.

**Key words:** community interpreting, cross-cultural communication, cultural mediation, intercultural competence.

Громадський переклад відіграє вирішальну роль у забезпеченні рівного доступу до державних послуг для лінгвістично та культурно різноманітного населення, однак процес перекладу виходить далеко за рамки передачі значення слів. Громадські перекладачі часто працюють на перетині кількох культурних рамок, орієнтуючись у відмінностях у стилях спілкування, соціальних нормах, цінностях та очікуваннях. Ця міжкультурна динаміка суттєво впливає на точність, ясність та ефективність перекладеної взаємодії. Незважаючи

на зростаюче визнання ролі перекладача як культурного посередника, дослідження конкретних міжкультурних вимірів, що формують громадський переклад, залишаються фрагментарними. Існуючі студії часто зосереджуються або на лінгвістичних аспектах перекладу, або на загальній міжкультурній комунікації без достатньої інтеграції цих двох сфер. Цей розрив стає особливо помітним у мультикультурних суспільствах, де комунікаційні невдачі, що кореняться в культурному непорозумінні, можуть призвести до неправильних діагнозів, порушення доступу до правосуддя або неефективного надання соціальної підтримки. Метою цього дослідження є аналіз міжкультурних вимірів, що формують практику громадського перекладу, та визначення того, як культурні фактори впливають на результати комунікації в багатомовному забезпеченні доступу до громадських послуг. Основні результати дослідження вказують на те, що культурні фактори, такі як стиль спілкування, соціальна ієрархія, цінності та контекстуально-специфічні норми, суттєво впливають на комунікацію, опосередковану перекладачем, що часто призводить до труднощів та непорозумінь. Перекладачі використовують різноманітні стратегії для вирішення цих проблем, включаючи уточнення неоднозначних термінів, надання коротких культурних роз'яснень та коригування стилю спілкування. Ефективність цих комунікативних та медіаційних стратегій тісно пов'язана з міжкультурною компетентністю, яка дозволяє перекладачам розпізнавати приховані культурні сигнали, вирішувати конфлікти цінностей та зберігати нейтралітет, одночасно сприяючи порозумінню співрозмовників. На завершення, дослідження підтверджує, що громадський переклад – це складна взаємодія, яка обумовлюється культурними змінними. Міжкультурна компетентність виступає фундаментальним фактором забезпечення професійної ефективності перекладача. Включення міжкультурної компетентності, психолінгвістичної обізнаності та сценарних практик до освітніх програм може значно покращити здатність перекладачів керувати культурно складними взаємодіями та забезпечити позитивні результати комунікації в медичних, юридичних, економічних та соціальних сферах.

**Ключові слова:** громадський переклад, міжкультурна комунікація, культурне посередництво, міжкультурна компетентність.

**Problem Statement.** Community interpreting plays a crucial role in ensuring equitable access to public services for linguistically and culturally diverse populations. However, the interpreting process extends far beyond the transfer of linguistic content. Community interpreters frequently operate at the intersection of multiple cultural frameworks, navigating differences in communication styles, social norms, values, and expectations. These cross-cultural dynamics substantially influence the accuracy, clarity, and effectiveness of interpreted interactions.

Despite the growing recognition of the interpreter's role as a cultural mediator, research on the specific cross-cultural dimensions that shape community interpreting remains fragmented. Existing studies often focus either on linguistic aspects of interpreting or on general intercultural communication without sufficiently integrating the two fields. As a result, there is a lack of systematic understanding of how cultural variables affect interpreter decision-making, interactional patterns, and outcomes in real-life community settings such as healthcare, legal, and social services.

This gap becomes particularly significant in multicultural societies, where communication failures rooted in cultural misunderstanding can lead to misdiagnoses, compromised access to justice, or ineffective delivery of social support. Therefore, a comprehensive examination of cross-cultural influences in community interpreting is needed to identify challenges, clarify the interpreter's mediating roles, and propose strategies for improving communication across cultures.

**Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.** Recent scholarship on community interpreting highlights its growing complexity as a communicative, cultural, and socially embedded practice. A substantial body of foundational theoretical work has been developed by international scholars, while Ukrainian researchers have contributed valuable context-specific insights, particularly regarding professional training, sector-specific interpreting, and psycholinguistic considerations.

Among the leading international studies, F. Pöchhacker's *Introducing Interpreting Studies* offers a comprehensive overview of interpreting theory and methodology, identifying community interpreting as a distinct field characterized by high interpersonal involvement and variability of settings [1]. Building on this interactional perspective, C. Wadensjö's seminal work *Interpreting as Interaction* conceptualizes the interpreter's role as co-constructive, emphasizing dialogic participation, turn-taking, and the interpreter's impact on communicative dynamics [2]. Complementing these

theoretical frameworks, E. Hsieh explores provider–interpreter–patient relationships in healthcare contexts, demonstrating how cultural expectations, power imbalances, and institutional norms shape interpreted encounters [3]. Likewise, H. Mikkelsen provides detailed insights into court interpreting, highlighting ethical challenges and the importance of cultural competence in legal communication [4]. H. Tebble further advances the discussion by positioning community interpreting within the broader transformation of multilingual societies, arguing that cultural mediation has become a central function of the interpreter [5]. From a cognitive-pragmatic viewpoint, E.-A. Gutt’s relevance-theoretical approach [6] underscores the importance of contextualized meaning-making, offering a conceptual basis for understanding how interpreters negotiate culturally loaded information.

Ukrainian scholarship has expanded the applied dimension of community interpreting research, addressing the country’s emerging multilingual demands and shifting professional landscape. The textbook *Community Interpreting. Tactical Medicine* presents an integrated model for interpreter training in high-risk emergency settings, focusing on the cultural and situational specificity of military and medical communication [7]. A similar emphasis on sector-specific practice is found in R. Povoroznyuk and I. Danylchenko’s *Community Interpreting in Economics and Entrepreneurship* [8], which examines culturally determined communication norms in business environments. Additionally, the textbook co-authored by R. Povoroznyuk, L. Slavova, and T. Donii offers a comprehensive introduction to court and community interpreting in Ukraine, highlighting the need to integrate intercultural awareness into interpreter training [9]. R. Povoroznyuk’s research article *Psycholinguistic Aspects of Teaching Community Interpreting in Ukraine* deepens this line of inquiry by analyzing cognitive processing, interpreter stress, and the role of cultural schemata in comprehension and production [10, p. 493–509].

Taken together, these studies demonstrate an increasing recognition of the cross-cultural dimensions inherent in community interpreting. International research provides theoretical and methodological frameworks for understanding interpreter mediation, interactional dynamics, and the cultural underpinnings of communication. Ukrainian scholarship enriches this perspective with applied, context-specific studies that address professional training, sectoral demands, and psycholinguistic factors. However, despite this growing body of literature, there remains a limited number of integrative works that systematically explore cross-cultural variables across various community interpreting domains. This gap underscores the need for further research focused specifically on cultural mediation, intercultural competence, and the interpreter’s role in managing culturally conditioned communication challenges.

**Purpose of the Study.** The purpose of this study is to examine the cross-cultural dimensions that shape the practice of community interpreting and to determine how cultural factors influence communication outcomes in multilingual public-service settings. Specifically, the research aims to identify the types of cultural differences that most frequently affect interpreter-mediated interactions; analyze the strategies community interpreters employ to manage culturally conditioned misunderstandings; and explore the extent to which intercultural competence contributes to the accuracy, clarity, and effectiveness of interpreting. By integrating theoretical perspectives with insights from recent scholarship on community interpreting, the study seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the interpreter’s role as a cultural mediator and to propose approaches that enhance communication across diverse cultural contexts.

This study is guided by a set of interconnected research objectives aimed at deepening the understanding of cross-cultural dimensions in community interpreting. The first objective is to identify the key cultural variables that influence interpreter-mediated communication across various public-service settings. In addition, the study seeks to analyze how community interpreters recognize and manage cross-cultural misunderstandings that emerge during interactions with clients and service providers. A further objective is to examine the role of intercultural competence in enhancing the accuracy, clarity, and overall effectiveness of community interpreting. Closely related to this is the

aim to explore the strategies and communicative techniques interpreters employ when acting as cultural mediators while maintaining ethical and professional standards. Finally, the study intends to synthesize relevant theoretical and practical insights in order to propose recommendations that may improve cross-cultural communication in community interpreting practice and training.

To achieve these goals, the research is structured around the following questions:

1. What cultural factors most significantly affect interpreter-mediated communication in community interpreting contexts?
2. How do community interpreters recognize and manage cross-cultural misunderstandings during interactions with clients and service providers?
3. In what ways does intercultural competence contribute to the effectiveness and accuracy of community interpreting?
4. What strategies do interpreters use to perform cultural mediation while maintaining professional neutrality and ethical standards?
5. How can the findings on cross-cultural dimensions inform improvements in professional training and practice in community interpreting?

Together, these objectives and questions form a coherent framework that directs the study toward a comprehensive analysis of how cultural dynamics shape the practice of community interpreting and how enhanced intercultural competence can support better communication outcomes in multilingual societies.

**Presentation of the Main Material.** Community interpreting is a dynamic practice that encompasses not only the transfer of linguistic content but also the negotiation of cultural meaning. As highlighted by F. Pöchhacker [1, p. 88–92, 121], interpreting extends beyond mere word-for-word translation; it involves mediating between different communicative norms and expectations. C. Wadensjö [2, 110–118] further emphasizes the interactive nature of interpreting, portraying interpreters as active participants in the construction of meaning within dialogues. These foundational perspectives establish the theoretical basis for understanding the intercultural dimensions of community interpreting.

The cultural factors influence interpreter-mediated communication to a significant extent. Cross-cultural differences in communication styles, norms of politeness, and context-specific expectations often create challenges for interpreters. H. Tebble notes that interpreters frequently encounter situations where cultural norms between service providers and clients diverge, which may lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations [5, p. 60–65]. R. Povoroznyuk's study on community interpreting in tactical medicine demonstrates that cultural perceptions of authority, urgency, and professional roles can directly impact the effectiveness of communication in high-pressure settings such as emergency medical care [7]. Similarly, R. Povoroznyuk and I. Danylchenko highlight sector-specific cultural nuances in economic and business interpreting, where expectations about negotiation, hierarchy, and decision-making differ across cultures [8].

Interpreters employ a variety of strategies to manage cultural misunderstandings. These include clarifying ambiguous terms, providing brief cultural explanations, and adjusting communication style to align with both parties' expectations. Thus, E. Hsieh underscores that in healthcare settings, interpreters often act as mediators who anticipate potential sources of confusion and adapt messages accordingly [3, p. 105–110]. R. Povoroznyuk's psycholinguistic study also highlights that interpreters rely on both linguistic knowledge and cognitive strategies, such as predictive comprehension and selective reformulation, to ensure that culturally laden information is conveyed accurately [10, p. 493–509].

The strategies of code-switching, contextual explanations, reformulations, and culturally appropriate nonverbal cues involve a balance between fidelity to the source message and adaptation to the recipient's cultural frame of reference. In line with H. Mikkelsen, interpreters often face ethical dilemmas, requiring them to mediate cultural differences while maintaining impartiality and professional standards [4, p. 121–125].

Community interpreters function not only as linguistic mediators but also as cultural and communicative brokers, navigating complex interactions where the expectations and norms of different parties may conflict. As highlighted by C. Wadensjö, interpreters are active participants in communication; they do not merely transfer words but shape the flow of interaction, manage turn-taking, and facilitate mutual understanding [2, p. 88–95]. This dual role requires both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness.

**Cultural mediation** in community interpreting can be defined as the process by which an interpreter facilitates understanding between parties by bridging cultural differences, clarifying culturally bound meanings, and adjusting communication to account for divergent norms, values, and expectations. Unlike general linguistic mediation, which focuses primarily on the accurate transfer of words or concepts, cultural mediation addresses implicit cultural knowledge, such as social conventions, politeness strategies, hierarchical relations, and context-specific interpretations that are often unspoken but critical for effective communication.

The distinction of cultural mediation in community interpreting lies in its proactive, context-sensitive, and ethically guided nature. It is not simply a translation of words, nor is it a subjective commentary. Rather, it is a structured, professional intervention that allows interpreters to manage potential cross-cultural friction, enhance mutual understanding, and ensure that both parties can engage meaningfully within their respective cultural frameworks. By integrating cultural mediation with linguistic and cognitive strategies, community interpreters ensure that communication is not only accurate but also culturally intelligible to all parties involved.

In summary, cultural mediation is the defining feature that distinguishes community interpreting from other forms of interpreting. It encompasses proactive management of cultural differences, ethical balancing of neutrality and intervention, and the application of specialized communicative and cognitive strategies to facilitate understanding across culturally diverse contexts.

Interpreters employ a range of cultural mediation strategies to address potential misunderstandings. These include clarification requests, paraphrasing, contextual elaboration, and non-verbal adjustments, all of which are aimed at ensuring that both parties interpret messages in line with their cultural and situational context. For example, in healthcare settings, E. Hsieh notes that interpreters often preempt culturally sensitive miscommunications by explaining concepts, norms, or expectations in ways that are accessible to both patients and providers, while avoiding introducing bias [3, p. 100–104].

Beyond these basic communicative tools, mediation strategies are essential for bridging cultural gaps. Interpreters must assess when literal translation may be insufficient due to differences in cultural assumptions, social hierarchies, or communicative styles. H. Tebble emphasizes that mediating culture involves balancing fidelity to the source message with adaptations that enhance understanding, often requiring the interpreter to negotiate meaning without overstepping ethical boundaries [5, p. 118–122]. R. Povoroznyuk's studies illustrate this in multiple contexts: in tactical medicine, interpreters must rapidly convey instructions across culturally distinct groups, sometimes adjusting phrasing to match professional hierarchies or local communication norms [7]; in legal settings, interpreters provide culturally sensitive clarification while ensuring procedural neutrality, thereby safeguarding access to justice [9].

These strategies are often context-dependent. In business or entrepreneurial settings, for example, R. Povoroznyuk and I. Danylchenko highlight that interpreters may need to manage differing expectations regarding negotiation styles, decision-making authority, or indirect communication [8]. In all these cases, interpreters act as cultural mediators, facilitating mutual understanding and reducing the risk of miscommunication.

Communicative and mediation strategies are central to the interpreter's role in community settings. They involve a combination of linguistic, cultural, and cognitive skills that enable interpreters to manage complex interactions, mediate cultural differences, and ensure that communication is both accurate and contextually appropriate. Mastery of these strategies is critical for professional practice across healthcare, legal, social, and business domains.

Importantly, the effectiveness of communicative and mediation strategies is closely tied to intercultural competence. Interpreters must recognize implicit cultural cues, anticipate potential conflicts, and adjust their communicative behavior accordingly. According to R. Povoroznyuk, psycholinguistic factors such as cognitive flexibility, working memory, and rapid comprehension also support the interpreter's ability to implement these strategies effectively under pressure [10, p. 493–509].

Intercultural competence allows interpreters to recognize implicit cultural cues, navigate value conflicts, and maintain neutrality while facilitating understanding. According to R. Povoroznyuk, L. Slavova, and T. Donii, the interpreter's role as a cultural mediator is particularly pronounced in legal settings, where miscommunication can have significant consequences for access to justice [9]. Similarly, E.-A. Gutt [6, p. 101–105] emphasizes the importance of relevance-theoretic approaches, showing that interpreters must infer intended meaning within context, often relying on cultural knowledge to fill gaps that literal translation cannot address.

Cross-cultural dimensions inform professional training of interpreters. Both R. Povoroznyuk [7; 8; 9] and H. Tebble [3, p. 180–185] argue that interpreter education should integrate intercultural competence alongside linguistic skills, emphasizing scenario-based training, role-play, and exposure to diverse communicative contexts. The psycholinguistic perspective presented by R. Povoroznyuk further suggests that training programs should develop cognitive flexibility, cultural awareness, and strategies for managing stress in high-stakes interpreting scenarios [10, p. 493–509]. These approaches contribute to improving communication outcomes in healthcare, legal, economic, and social service settings.

**Conclusions.** This study has examined the cross-cultural dimensions of community interpreting and highlighted the central role of interpreters as cultural mediators in diverse public-service settings. The analysis of recent research and Ukrainian and international scholarship demonstrates that community interpreting is not merely a linguistic activity but a complex interaction shaped by cultural variables, contextual expectations, and social norms.

Key findings reveal that cultural factors, such as communication styles, social hierarchies, values, and context-specific norms, significantly influence interpreter-mediated communication. Interpreters face challenges in recognizing and managing potential misunderstandings arising from these differences. Strategies such as clarifying ambiguous terms, providing cultural explanations, adapting communication styles, and employing context-sensitive reformulations are crucial in mitigating cross-cultural miscommunication.

Intercultural competence emerges as a fundamental factor in interpreter effectiveness. It enables interpreters to navigate implicit cultural cues, maintain neutrality, and facilitate accurate and meaningful communication. Incorporating intercultural competence, psycholinguistic awareness, and scenario-based practice into educational programs can enhance interpreters' ability to manage culturally complex interactions and improve communication outcomes for clients and service providers alike.

In conclusion, understanding and addressing the cross-cultural dimensions of community interpreting is essential for effective practice. Interpreters' ability to act as cultural mediators not only ensures accurate message transfer but also promotes equity, understanding, and access in multilingual and multicultural societies. Future research should continue to explore the interaction between cultural factors, interpreter strategies, and training methods to further refine best practices in community interpreting.

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