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The Invisible Labor and Ethics of Interpreting

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Abstract

In this review, we call for heightened attention to the labor of interpreters to think more reflexively about our own professional ethics and the paradoxes of global capitalism within which both interpreters and anthropologists work. Like other forms of communicative labor, interpretation is often devalued, unrecognized, and uncompensated—a form of invisible labor. Professional language ideologies, some paradoxically perpetuated by the profession itself, contribute to interpreters' invisibility in their workplaces. Global and multilingual organizations depend on ideologies of transparency and the assumption that language transmission is easy; examining interpreters' labor ethnographically troubles these assumptions. Interpreters also confront an ethical tension in their position that mirrors a tension in anthropology: namely, between ideals of professional neutrality and analytic distance versus intentional advocacy. The study of interpreters offers ways to critically assess anthropologists' own professional practices and dig deeply into the contradictions of global capitalism.

INTRODUCTION

In the 2021 American Anthropological Association presidential address, Gupta & Stoolman asked why anthropologists "persist in erasing the labor of those with less cultural and educational capital—translators, teachers in the field, students, and interlocutors in academic settings" (Gupta & Stoolman 2022, p. 786). In this review, we call for heightened recognition of the work of one category implicitly referred to here: interpreters. Interpreters are essential in global and multilingual contexts. Their labor enables global institutions to realize inclusive aspirations. Not coincidentally, then, interpreters are at the center of arenas that anthropologists study: global capitalism, mass media and mediation, Deaf cultures, global health, refugee and migration studies, the humanitarian industry, neoliberalism, multilingualism, and the ethics of fieldwork. Because interpreters work in the nodes of massive economic and political projects, including within anthropologists' own projects, ethnographic attention to their labor pushes us to think more reflexively about our own professional ethics and the paradoxes of global capitalism within which both interpreters and anthropologists work.

Interpreters engage in embodied communicative labor through the medium of speech or sign language (Koomen 2014, Marie & Friedner 2021, Rao 2021a). Like other forms of communicative labor, it is often devalued, unrecognized, and uncompensated—a form of invisible labor (Crain et al. 2016, Hatton 2017). Interpreters historically tend to be of lower status (women, children, marginalized or coerced workers, servants, slaves), which contributes to this devaluation. In the scholarship about interpreters, invisibility remains a contested frame for discussions about interpreters' ideal professional roles. Interpreters' invisible labor overlaps with related forms of labor encompassed within interpreting work that are also often unacknowledged: affective and emotional labor (Hochschild 2012, Mankekar & Gupta 2016) as well as care labor (García-Sánchez 2018). Together, these forms of invisible labor reveal how capital extracts value from "activities it does not recognize as productive [work]" (Lukács 2020, p. 17).

Several reviews have addressed interpretation and/or interpreters (Friedner & Kusters 2020, García-Sánchez 2018, Heller 2010, McIntosh 2021). Some have included discussions of translation and the indeterminacy of meaning (Gal 2015, Pillen 2016, Povinelli 2001). One article points to interpretation as labor (Urciuoli & LaDousa 2013). This is the first review focused exclusively on the labor of interpreters. We draw on anthropological studies about interpreters and those that reference interpreters' work, as well as scholarship from the emerging field of interpreting studies (e.g., Mikkelson & Jourdenais 2018, Pöchhacker 2016) and related fields, to ask, What might the study of interpreters' labor and its hazards offer to ethnographies of contemporary global governance and political economy? And how might this understanding inform our own practices, given that interpreting work is central to anthropological field research, including in biological and in archaeological fieldwork?

To make interpreting labor more broadly visible, we first describe the nature and conditions of interpreters' work. Next, we describe flows of global capital in which interpreting labor is key, including those in which anthropologists are enmeshed. Here we show how interpreters become part of the infrastructure of global and multilingual organizations, enabling the seemingly smooth transfer of information and knowledge. Ethnographies of interpreters and their work trouble the ideologies of transparency, immediacy, and ease of transmission on which global organizations depend to justify their authority and how they operate overall. We next discuss linguistic anthropological insights about ideologies of voice and language that can illuminate the complexities of interpreting. We give particular attention to work on voice, texts, and circulation, and the implications for the circulation of writing from global organizations as well as ethnographies that anthropologists produce. Finally, we discuss a tension that both anthropologists and interpreters know well, namely, the tension between ideals of professional neutrality and analytic distance

versus intentional advocacy. Our final section considers the relation between anthropologists and interpreters, noting how interpreters or research assistants have been (or have not been) discussed within conversations about anthropological ethics. We argue that attention to interpreters within our discipline provides insight into the social hierarchies we study and illuminates anthropological research practices to which we have not fully attended.

ON THE NATURE AND CONDITIONS OF INTERPRETING LABOR

Interpreting is the practice of conveying meaning in a live interaction, from speech or sign language in one code into another code. After receiving the initial message, a professional interpreter attempts to capture as much meaning as possible in a new message that they construct in the other language, making judgment calls along the way about what is relevant. Professional interpreters are taught to deliver this new message in the first person ("I") so that parties are not confused about who is the author of the message. A bilingual person without experience or training may rely heavily on paraphrasing or summarizing content; therefore, among nonprofessional interpreters, there is a great variety of practices. An interpreter accomplishes their task through two main temporal modes: consecutive interpreting or simultaneous interpreting. In consecutive interpreting, each participant takes turns and waits while the interpreter relays back the message. In simultaneous interpreting, the interpreter works at the same time that the participants speak, listening and relaying the message nearly synchronously. In both modes, to communicate a depth of meaning, speech and sign language interpreters also account for gesture, embodiment, facial gesture, register, intonation, and hesitation or self-repair, as they see fit to convey the message. To execute this complex set of tasks effectively, interpreters learn and use focused listening, strategic memory, syntactic and morphological prediction, note taking, and self-monitoring and self-correction skills. The suite of skills together allows interpreters to do a number of other tasks at once, depending on working contexts, which may include managing distinct social hierarchies; attending to individuals' stances; and accommodating participants' experiences so that they feel understood and comfortable to proceed in the interaction.

The embodied nature of the job and its condensed time frame, particularly with simultaneous interpreting, make it both a physically and a cognitively demanding form of labor (Moser-Mercer et al. 1998). Unlike translators, who relay meaning across texts in different languages, interpreters work in real time without extended periods to consider phrasing. Perhaps due to this temporal limitation, the labor of interpreting is frequently not recognized as work. Interpreting labor is often coerced, expected to be free or nearly free, or entirely naturalized as an aspect of another job, glossed as "bilingual skills." Even paid and highly professional interpreters struggle with nonpaying or late-paying customers and face expectations to provide extra free labor (S. Rao, research interviews on file with author).

Because interpreting labor is largely unacknowledged and unregulated, different kinds and degrees of abuse of power are not uncommon. Berk-Seligson (2009) shows how bilingual police officers who act as interpreters coerce confessions, as they do not need to abide by an interpreter's professional code of ethics. Lack of regulation can also lead to the abuse of interpreters themselves. For example, requiring interpreters to work too many hours, often without sufficient breaks, food, or water, is a common complaint among many interpreters employed in high-intensity human rights missions and US immigration courts (Kunreuther et al. 2021; Rao, under review). These poor working conditions make it more difficult to sustain quality interpretation, putting the overall quality of the work at risk.

As subjects, interpreters are in constant flux between hypervisibility and seeming invisibility produced by the institutions in which they work (Angelelli 2004, Babül 2017, Cole 2010). Interpreters must "perform invisibility as 'embedded strangers'" (Giustini 2022, p. 15) and work

as what Wadensjö (2008), drawing on Goffman, calls "nonpersons" (p. 186). Ethnography of communication has shown that interpreter invisibility is reinforced by the interactional structure of interpreting [Berk-Seligson 2017 (1990), Wadensjö 2008]. Meanwhile, data based on interpreters' experiences show that the subjective work experience of interpreting entrenches feelings of invisibility (Angelelli 2004). Many interpreters aspire to invisibility as a sign of professionalism and a means to contend with the work (Koomen 2014, Swigart 2019). Yet, as Swigart (2019) contends, "increased visibility of how language experts work. . .could optimize the performance of LSS [Language Services Section] staff and, by extension, the [ICC] Court overall" (p. 289). The cumulative lack of recognition or "bastard status" of interpreters itself creates the conditions for conflicts in the workplace (Pian 2022). Such conflicts include upholding legal schemes of employment that separate and keep interpreters out of sight and disempowered at work (Giustini 2022). At the same time, interpreters have collectively organized to create better working conditions (Rao 2021b).

Professionals with whom interpreters work frequently subscribe to the language ideology of "referential transparency" (Haviland 2003), the notion that exact referential meanings are easily conveyed through the "conduit" of language (Reddy 1979). Interpreters' work is often seen as merely replicating others' words, and, therefore, like other forms of vicarious language (Inoue 2018), institutions presume interpreting is largely mechanical. This perspective leads to interpreters being conceived of as "a conduit pipe" or "bi-lingual transmitters" (Laster & Taylor 1994, p. 79). Nevertheless, when this conduit model does not serve participants' objectives, such as trial attorneys' hopes for cross-examination, lawyers and others in the court are willing to see more linguistic complexity (Ng 2009). Ideologies from both interpreting and formal institutions—such as the prioritization of semantic over pragmatic equivalence (Angermeyer 2021), the preference for denotational meaning as an indicator of credibility (Jacquemet 2015), or the prescription that a person must commit to one language alone (Angermeyer 2015, p. 137)—have been shown to create confusing and procedurally unfair interactions. In this way, professional language ideologies, these very cultural beliefs about language inherited from the professions, can establish disadvantageous working conditions not just for interpreters, but for all who work with them (S. Rao, article under review). Many scholars of interpreting studies show us that despite these language ideologies and professional protocols, interpretation work is best understood as a dialogic interaction and a social and political event (Roy 2000, Wadensjö 1998), where interpreters serve as the "gatekeepers" of the interaction (Davidson 2000).

Because interpreters typically work within asymmetrical relations of power, they bear the emotional and affective burden of this asymmetry, and this burden includes their employment with anthropologists as well. Interpreters must create the right affective atmosphere for effective communication (Giustini 2019, Ruiz Rosendo 2021). Traumatizing settings such as war zones (C. Baker 2010, M. Baker 2010, Footit & Kelly 2012), truth commissions (Cole 2010), international criminal trials (Elias-Bursać 2015, García 2019), and refugee status or asylum interviews are common contexts for interpretation work (Blommaert 2009, Jacquemet 2011, Maryns 2014). Emerging work on conflict-zone and human rights field interpreters shows how they negotiate between the professional ethics of neutrality and the subjective ethics of bearing witness (Kunreuther 2020, Stahuljak 2000). Interpreters may experience vicarious trauma that comes from interpreting disturbing narratives using "I," while remaining relatively unnoticed in the process (Bancroft 2017, Schweda Nicholson 2010). Refugee interpreters employed by humanitarian agencies in camps can reexperience first-hand trauma, since they interpret difficult testimony that may bear strong resemblance to their own traumatic pasts (Bertrand 2022). Meanwhile, medical settings (Angelelli 2004, Davidson 2000) and schools (Reynolds et al. 2015) are not "violent" or "traumatic" in the same sense as in a war zone or emergency context, but they

are nevertheless intense environments for all participants and can also lead to emotional stress or burnout for interpreters without proper support.

INTERPRETERS IN THE GLOBAL POLITICAL ECONOMY

Within these work settings, interpreters ease and enable the very political-economic flows and frictions that many anthropologists study (e.g., Appadurai 1996, Tsing 2005). Their work is foundational to all aspects of neoliberal capitalist extraction—from transactions between multinational corporations, to the development of international trade law, the conception and implementation of development regimes, the resolution of business conflict, and the management and extraction of labor on the ground. But, despite interpreters' crucial role in global networks and capital, interpreters have not yet figured centrally in the anthropology of mediation, globalization, and capitalism (e.g., Ganti 2014, Mazzarella 2004, Shankar & Cavanaugh 2012), and there is great potential for studies on interpreters to contribute to this scholarship. To integrate interpreting labor into the analysis of global capitalism, anthropologists and allied social scientists must recognize the extent of the role and experiences of interpreters in the settings under study. Doing so, in turn, will allow for a parallel analysis of interpreting labor within anthropology itself.

Sociolinguists have identified the challenges that linguistic diversity poses for monolingual state agencies and the people who use them, especially in asylum hearings (Blommaert 2009, Jacquemet 2011, Maryns 2014). Interpreters often help eliminate deficiencies within an asylum process by explaining important cultural gaps or adding necessary background information (Jiménez-Ivars & León-Pinilla 2018). When United Nations (UN) asylum courts forbid interpreters from providing such cultural explanations, Barsky (1996) argues, the UN is not abiding by its own defined rights of refugees. Some have focused on language workers in global capitalism as their work is leveraged toward the aims of commercial enterprises: tourism (Heller 2010), the staffing and recruitment of migrant workers (Piller & Lising 2014), and the work of journalists' fixers (Arjomand 2022, Palmer 2019). People who interpret, paid and unpaid, often appear as important subjects of these studies, but they are not primarily analyzed as either workers or interpreters. The broader structural conditions and microconditions of their work are instead relegated to context, rather than being a subject of analysis themselves (Rao 2021b).

Political projects in the interest of global capital also depend on interpreting labor. Historically, interpreters were essential for all areas of colonial rule: conquest, establishment of authority and governance (Hagedorn 1995), diplomatic relations and practices (Rothman 2021), production of cultural knowledge that is essential to colonization such as for creating maps (Hellman 2021), and extraction of local labor and resources (Ngai 2011), including slave labor (Fayer 2003). More contemporary neoimperial projects and military occupations recruit local people as interpreters to entrench their power and ideologies within communities. These interpreters find themselves in unique predicaments of positionality (C. Baker 2010, Campbell 2016), caught between states and institutions. Interpreters are often promised protection, refuge, or asylum in return for their work, as was the case among many Iraqi and Afghan interpreters, but such promises are not consistently kept (de Jong 2022). Military interpreters, who are typically local residents enlisted by a foreign occupying force, face even more dangerous suspicion of competing loyalties: They often wear face coverings or go in plain clothes to protect their identity as they move between the foreign military and their own communities (Campbell 2016, Footit & Kelly 2012, McIntosh 2021, Rafael 2016).

Global humanitarian industries also recruit interpreters for peacekeeping forces (C. Baker 2010, Bos & Suters, Footit & Kelly 2012) and humanitarian missions, such as those of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (Delgado Luchner & Kherbiche 2019). Professional interpreters employed by the UN in Geneva are also

hired for short-term UN field missions (Ruiz Rosendo et al. 2021). Anthropological research on the implementation of human rights regimes shows that interpreters and other multilingual actors have an unrecognized influence on the instantiation of human rights discourse on the ground through a process of "vernacularization" (Merry 2006; see also Babül 2017, Flemmer 2018). As these realities become clearer, some nongovernmental organizations have shifted strategies to embrace translators and interpreters in consulting roles in humanitarian crises and to involve them as they adapt to the challenges and benefits that multilingual approaches present (Moreno-Rivero 2018, Rosga 2005).

Hallmark neoliberal policies of austerity, deregulation, and private contracting of public services (Ganti 2014) have led to worsened working conditions for employed interpreters in first-world, resource-extracting countries such as the United States (Rao 2021b) and the United Kingdom (Maniar 2016). Interpreters also occupy other special work statuses that leave them without protections from any labor laws. In refugee camps, for example, refugee interpreters gain employment as "incentive workers," a special category of work in refugee camps that compensates refugees through extremely low wages and fringe benefits (e.g., access to Wi-Fi and electricity) (Bertrand 2022, Delgado Luchner & Kherbiche 2019, Moser-Mercer et al. 2014). Global agencies depend on the unrecognized work of interpretation to extract both capital and labor. Interpreters depend on the interpreting work for survival, which paradoxically helps reproduce the conditions of capital extraction. Meanwhile, the excesses and externalities of capitalism, climate change among them, have increased the need for interpreters in dangerous crisis contexts. The precarity of these workers indicates the importance of interpreter invisibility not just to the continued extraction of their labor, but to the accumulation of capital itself.

VOICE, TEXTS, CIRCULATION

The work of interpretation provides us, then, with insights into the ways that global institutions of governance function. These institutions rest on particular ideologies of voice and language within which all interpreters work. Unpacking such ideologies helps us see into the broader processes of international governance and their contradictions. Anthropologists have explored and challenged modern ideologies of voice that presume the voice is a wellspring of self-expression, interiority, and agency (Bauman & Briggs 2003; Harkness 2014; Kunreuther 2014; Weidman 2006, 2021)—and the figure of the interpreter illuminates these discussions. Like all speakers, interpreters articulate well-known social identities and characters (Agha 2005, Keane 1999) that remain, ostensibly, distinct from their "selves." Yet the collusion of voice, self, and interiority is often foundational in these same institutions among the other subjects formed in the work of governance—refugees, asylum seekers, patients, claimants of all kinds—for whom interpreters interpret. Furthermore, these institutions operate within modern Lockean ideologies of language that imagine all languages are transparent media and therefore presume an ease of transmission across codes (Bauman & Briggs 2003). Linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists have worked hard to dispel this myth of language neutrality by drawing attention to the material qualities of voice, language, and the mediation involved in all semiosis (e.g., Eisenlohr 2018, Gershon & Manning 2014). Interpreters' work provides further evidence of the complex mediation involved in any language work.

Ethnographic and sociolinguistic studies show how interpreters shift their alignment and style of speech in order to facilitate smoother communication across uneven cultural terrain. In courtroom trials, for example, witnesses who rely on interpreters lose credibility because of the pauses and inevitable narrative breaks, thereby shattering the myth of language equivalence and neutrality [Angermeyer 2021, Berk-Seligson 2017 (1990)]. Interpreters must embody several different

social statuses and registers simultaneously, moving between differently empowered languages. A peacekeeping interpreter in Bosnia, for example, must shift between the speaking style of a Bosnian resident, who values "[a]mbiguity and subtlety," and a UN officer, who privileges the "referential function" of language (Bos & Soeters 2006, p. 264). In politically charged settings, such as when Guatemalan state lawyers cross-examine Indigenous Ixil witnesses about their experience in a genocide, both sides may read shifts in register as "betrayals" or "misunderstandings" that index politically antagonistic subject positions within the state (García 2019). In high-stakes human rights missions, some officers work with the same interpreter long enough that they claim to calibrate the tempo of speech, gestures, and intonation so that the interpreter's voice appears to merge with that of the officer, as if they inhabit a single body (Kunreuther 2020, p. 304). Harkness (2017) similarly demonstrates how Reverend Billy Graham's celebrated interpreter, Billy Kim, mimics the Reverend's gestures, intonation, and force of expression to "become one" with Graham and the "voice of God" simultaneously (p. 113). Future ethnographies about interpreters would benefit by drawing out the sonic dimensions of interpreting labor, as interpreters negotiate being perceived and experiencing themselves as both earwitnesses and conduits of voice (Kunreuther 2020), to make a robust contribution to doing anthropology in sound (Feld & Brenneis 2004).

Interpreters exemplify the Bakhtinian principle of dialogism that no utterance is completely one's own (Bakhtin 1981); their speech is always an iteration of someone else's words in another language. Meaning emerges through the interpreting interaction among all parties [Berk Seligson 2017 (1990), Wadensjö 1998], requiring interpreters to shift regularly from an "animator" to an "author" who "takes responsibility for the flow and maintenance of conversation" (Roy 2000, p. 121). Like other forms of reported or vicarious speech, interpretation is never simply a repetition (Gal 2015, Inoue 2018). Many scholars therefore view the interpreted message as a form of "transduction" (Harkness 2017, Silverstein 2003) or "radical translation" (Mannheim 2015, Povinelli 2001), noting that inevitable changes must occur to effectively communicate across cultural and political contexts.

Interpreters' work resonates with a host of other "voices for hire" in the global economy, such as voice actors, playback singers, call center workers, or dubbing artists, who all attempt to erase the traces of their labor while becoming audible (Ganti 2021, Heller 2010, Mankekar & Gupta 2016, Nozawa 2016, Sherouse 2015, Weidman 2021). In each job, the worker becomes a "delegated voice" hired to speak professionally as another person or people (Keane 1991; cf. Irvine 1989). Dubbing artists, in an attempt to "not sound dubbed," rarely have a script to study before they dub the film (Ganti 2021, Sherouse 2015), working much like sight translation, a mode in which an interpreter works from a text they have not seen in advance, interpreting out loud and on the spot. Like Tamil playback singers (Weidman 2021) and Japanese voice actors (Nozawa 2016) who practice the "art of becoming unnoticed" (p. 175), interpreters also emphasize they are not the source of the words they speak. Through the use of "I" to refer exclusively to voices other than themselves, as Rafael (2016) suggests, interpreters (in this case military "terps") appear like ghostly presences, who can move across otherwise impenetrable linguistic walls (p. 138).

The work of interpreting reveals circuits between text and voice and illustrates the processes of entextualization (e.g., Inoue 2018, Urban 1996). Interpreters enable the movement of voices far from individual speakers to become material for written documents such as those produced for legal or asylum cases, human rights reports, medical files, evidence in international criminal trials, or even ethnographies (Doughty 2016, Smith-Khan 2017). Alternately, texts themselves may also be integral to the interpreting context, such as the Bible in church settings (e.g., Friedner 2018, Harkness 2017, Schieffelin 2007, Vigoroux 2010). In other settings, texts are produced as an alternative to oral interpretation, as Collins demonstrates in a Dutch medical clinic that developed a multilingual health manual, which ironically became a "self-defeating instrument,"

eliciting additional speech that health care workers could not understand (Collins 2006). More implicitly, legal texts discursively frame many interpreting contexts such as humanitarian missions (Delgado Luchner & Kherbiche 2019) or international criminal courts (Doughty 2016, Swigart 2019). When the work of interpretation is turned into texts—human rights reports, a refugee's case file, evidence for an international criminal trial, and ethnographies—the embodied nature of interpreters' labor is typically erased.

INTERPRETERS AS MODERN SUBJECTS: PROFESSIONALS AND ADVOCATES

Interpreters occupy two sometimes competing modern subject positions—the neutral professional and the entangled advocate—and these disparate positionalities shape debates about the ethical protocols of interpreting among scholars. In the mid-twentieth century, the trappings of professionalism in interpreting multiplied significantly, including university departments, training programs, certifications, professional associations, and codes of ethics. Professionalism developed through the advent of new audio technology, just as professional anthropologists adopted the voice recorder as a necessity for fieldwork. During the interwar years, technology investors, along with a small group of interpreters, developed simultaneous interpreting with the newly patented Filene-Finlay machine, which enabled a simultaneous audiofeed while interpreters spoke, and audiences could tune into particular language "channels" (Baigorri-Jalón 2014, Roland 1999). After successfully launching at the Nuremberg trials (Gaiba 1998), simultaneous interpreting went on to become a type of gold standard for interpreting. The use of such technologies contributed to a cultural perception of interpreting skills as "technical" and no longer a celebrated art (Baigorri-Jalón 2014).

Codes of ethics, education, and training are linchpins across the interpreting profession as they are within the anthropological profession. The International Association of Conference Interpreters, abbreviated under its French acronym AIIC, and founded in 1953, led the way in codifying professional ethics and organization and formalized these in their union's first collective bargaining agreement with the UN in 1969. Specific subfields and groups of interpreters have followed this model. In contexts outside of the UN, including US courts, scholars have noted that governments overemphasize certification and testing over ethical training and education, despite interpreter demands for these to improve performance (Drugan 2017, Wallace 2015). The result is a diminished pipeline into the profession, in which unprepared interpreters must often learn context-specific ethical and procedural knowledge on the job (Gonzalez et al. 2012), leading them to adapt to interpreting settings in ways that can significantly shape interactions (Angermeyer 2015, Hseih 2007). In settings where there is no training at all, such as during human rights missions or some humanitarian missions, interpreters often resort to scanning the Internet for videos or lectures about how interpreters work (L. Kunreuther, personal observation).

Impartiality and neutrality are central in most interpreters' codes of ethics, but as several have argued, these codes may conflict with the personal ethics of many community interpreters. Community interpreters, who often see their job as performing some form of advocacy, stand at much greater proximity to the parties involved (Hale 2007), interpret for people in the midst of crisis (Roberts et al. 2000), and typically have intimate ties with the community in which they are working (Menzel 2019). Interpreters may do the work of explaining important cultural gaps or adding necessary context (Jiménez-Ivars & León-Pinilla 2018), becoming much more than a neutral conduit. Green (2015) shows that in the World Federation of the Deaf's World Congress, where professional international sign (IS) language interpreters are hired, many Deaf attendees prefer to rely on cultural insiders as informal interpreters. The labor of cultural insiders can

also be conscripted by employers, or it can be volunteered as subtle attempts to advocate for the linguistically disadvantaged in unofficial spaces, to avoid the risk of violating codes of ethics or institutional rules—what López-Espino calls "linguistic sympathy" (López-Espino 2023).

Interpreters stand at the epicenter of power, mediating between professionals (lawyers, doctors, humanitarian officials) who provide services and clients who are dependent on these professionals for more than just language. As professionals, interpreters inevitably align with the institutions or actors who pay them, but community members often feel that interpreters should be their proactive advocates. For example, during the mandated prior consultations between Indigenous communities and Peruvian state actors, interpreters expressed profound discomfort in being asked not to refer to their Indigenous community as "us," which symbolically aligned them with the state agents who employed them (Flemmer 2018, p. 529). Babül (2017) shows that Turkish interpreters working in international human rights workshops often adjusted their tone and significantly edited the content of the foreign expert's words into appropriate Turkish "state language" to express their ultimate affiliation with their fellow citizens (pp. 125–50).

While many interpreters are members of the communities in which they interpret, there are always internal stratifying hierarchies of age, race, gender, sexuality, religion, hearing status, ability, etc., that open them up to questions about their own interests and loyalties, much like anthropologists who work in their own communities. Children who act as interpreters for their family members are perhaps the most numerous of interpreter-advocates in the world today. A wide range of scholarship about child interpreters focuses on how interpreting is embedded in the everyday routine of caregiving within migrant and Deaf community life (see García-Sánchez 2018). Child interpreters are often put into extremely difficult positions in which they need to regularly manage racial as well as other forms of discrimination (Orellana 2009) and indeed state surveillance (Reynolds et al. 2015). But they also find ways to resist doing the work or may perform the work in particular ways to protect a family member from mistreatment, including withholding information (Orellana et al. 2003). Children who grew up interpreting and go on to pursue professional interpreting work may face conflicts between their advocacy habits and a professional code of ethics that espouses notions of neutrality and fidelity (Angelelli 2010).

Some interpreters see themselves primarily as activists in pursuit of social justice. Many try to understand how their clients want to experience interpreted interactions. Professional sign language interpreters negotiate the stance of being neutral, while at the same time, exhibiting the right "attitude" that highlights deaf people's agency and autonomy (Friedner 2018, p. 663). In Hanoi, interpreters and deaf communities work together on long-term advocacy projects, in which the interpreter constantly emphasizes a commitment to advocacy while also insisting that deaf people are in the lead (Marie 2023). In addition, some scholars and interpreters themselves refer to their work as culture brokers—"intercultural agents" (Barsky 1996), "citizen diplomats" in the case of Russian interpreters during the Cold War (Menzel 2019), or patient advocates (Davidson 2000)—highlighting the complex cultural work and political stakes of being an interpreter. Interpreters have also put forward collective efforts to advocate for the communities with whom they work. In 2002, a network of interpreters named Babels formed to assist the transnational network of left-wing antiglobalization activists at the European Social Forum meeting in Florence (Baker 2013, Boéri 2008). By 2005, the network's numbers had increased to a staggering 9,000 member-volunteers, including professional interpreters. Babels worked along the principles of horizontal activism that stress nonhierarchical organization and direct action, presenting challenges to both capitalism and the dominance of colonial languages (Boéri 2008).

Their approach was not without genuine conflict and controversy within the interpreting community, who felt that volunteer interpreting devalued their labor (Baker 2013). On their website, Babels's most recent calls for volunteers date back to the mid-2010s. But new groups with similar

community-organizing approaches to interpreting have recently emerged. In the United States, the Los Angeles Tenants Union, a bilingual+ organization, draws on their membership, including several professional practicing interpreters, to train community interpreters; all meetings are interpreted into at least Spanish and other languages based on need. Recently, in the US South, the Highlander Institute, a longtime leader in language community organizing, and the Center for Participatory Change convened a coalition of nine community organizing groups to set goals to train interpreters for activist agendas. In considering their own activism and advocacy in relation to the communities they represent, anthropologists will benefit from conversations with interpreters about how they organize their work and themselves to support communities as well as the conflicts they face in doing so.

Interpreters' shifting alignments between the position of professional language workers who remain neutral vis-à-vis their clients and their position as cultural and linguistic advocates mirror debates in anthropology about the political and ethical roles of anthropologists. Some anthropologists define their professional expertise by their ability to step back and deeply theorize cultural processes, while others use their disciplinary knowledge to become political and cultural advocates for the communities with whom they work and study. These roles no doubt overlap, and anthropologists, like interpreters, more commonly occupy both stances at varying moments and degrees, depending on the context. But the connection between anthropology and interpreting within these two subject positions may go further. Some anthropologists become interpreters as part of their research design (e.g., Shrestha 2019) or act as interpreters occasionally in asylum trials or other governmental spaces as part of their support and advocacy for communities with whom they work. Ethnographers may volunteer their own solidarity, offering friendship and emotional support in a needed language, without explicitly interpreting (López-Espino 2023). All these approaches respond to and enter anthropologists into the political economy of interpreting in different ways, with complications for the institutionalization of services (Barrett et al. 2016, Rao 2018).

ANTHROPOLOGISTS AND INTERPRETERS

In conclusion, we return to Gupta & Stoolman's questions in the 2021 presidential address by reflecting on the relationship between anthropologists and interpreters within anthropological work itself. Most anthropologists rely on interpreters, often glossed as research assistants or translators, during fieldwork. This arrangement creates what Obeyesekere calls the "interpreter effect," wherein the social identity and position of the interpreter shape the kind of knowledge to which an anthropologist has access and, therefore, the research itself (Obeyesekere 1990). As we engage in the hermeneutic task of retelling people's stories and lives, understanding the complexity of interpreters' labor may help us address the ethical and epistemological concerns that anthropologists face in our work.

Cultural interpretation and translation arguably lie at the core of anthropological practice. The cultural interpretative work of a professional language interpreter and that of an anthropologist clearly differ, but in the anthropological field, these two forms of interpretation inevitably overlap, given the inextricability of language and culture (e.g., Bank & Bank 2013, Middleton & Cons 2014). While unavoidable, the collapse of these two forms of interpretation makes it difficult to recognize the full extent of interpreters' labor in the field. Interpreters working with anthropologists often do more than interpret across languages. By providing access to communities and linguistic and cultural interpretation, they help constitute the anthropological field and shape the emergent anthropological knowledge (Gujar & Gold 1992, Gupta & Ferguson 1997, Raffles 2002).

Obscuring of the research assistant's labor in the field paradoxically echoes the interpreter's seeming invisibility in other settings discussed above, which anthropologists study and

critique. Over the last two decades, several anthropologists have condemned the relative "silence" (Borchgrevink 2003) or "opaque presence" (Middleton & Cons 2014) of interpreters and research assistants in both ethnographic texts and anthropological research guides. Anthropologists have discussed their complex relation with research assistants as a form of "hidden colonialism" (Sanjek 1993), built on relations of "dependence" (Cons 2014) and "collaboration" (Hoffman & Tarawalley 2014), and, ultimately, as a relation between "employer-employee" (Middleton & Cons 2014, p. 284). Borchgrevink (2003) links the silence about interpreters in the field to thorny questions of linguistic competence. Indeed, more than four decades ago, Owusu (1978) decried the problematic state of the ethnographic knowledge across Africa produced by Euro-American "experts," who relied heavily on native interpreters without interrogating these individuals' language skills or particular personal histories and political interests.

Many scholars agree that anthropology's own professional myths about fieldwork hinder full recognition of the centrality of a research assistant to the discipline (Bank & Bank 2013, Borchgrevink 2003, Middleton & Cons 2014). Asad's (1986) pointed critique of cultural translation in British social anthropology highlights the problematic movement of foreign cultural concepts into anthropological texts without acknowledgment of the multiple power asymmetries through which concepts become legible. Interpreters are an important part of this process; anthropological theory itself emerges through these dialogues with interpreters. For example, Turner's symbolic analyses of the mundi tree emerged through conversations with his interpreter, Windson, and a key religious expert, Muchona (see Hoffman & Tarawalley 2014). Sociological concepts, such as "marginal men," were developed through several Chicago anthropologists' conversations with Mexican research assistants. These assistants later became anthropologists, who then went on to use and change the concept in their work for the Mexican state (Wong 2019). The interpreters and research assistants of Morgan and Boas—Ely Parker and George Hunt—have been widely recognized as central in shaping anthropological knowledge about Indigenous groups in Canada and the United States (e.g., Bruchac 2014, Glass 2019, Lamphere 2004, Simpson 2018). But Hunt's own reliance on other, unpaid interpreters, such as his own wives, remained obscure until recently (Bruchac 2014). The "intimate knowledge" that arises out of these relations, as Raffles (2002) argues, calls attention to spatialized hierarchies of knowledge production emergent in everyday, affective relations (p. 332). Intimate knowledge situates interpreters and other research assistants at the center of knowledge claims made by anthropologists.

We gain deeper insight into the political contexts of the discipline when we consider interpreters' own backgrounds prior to working with anthropologists. As we demonstrated above, interpreters typically work in the midst of political and economic turbulence. In many colonial settings, research assistants frequently worked as professional or volunteer interpreters prior to being hired by anthropologists, a fact often noted in passing (Bauman & Briggs 2003, Bruchac 2014, Simpson 2018). This position may have affected how interpreters approach their work with anthropologists. In their work as interpreters, for example, Parker and Hunt engaged in highly contentious political struggles about land dispossession and sovereignty between settler colonial projects and Indigenous governments. Others, such as Rafael Mwakala, who worked for the Dias team in Mozambique, engaged in anticolonial political activities, which he actively hid from his Portuguese employers (West 2004, pp. 63–65). But rather than being understood as political actors involved in the bitter conflicts of settler colonialism, research assistants, once hired, appear to enter a zone of neutrality imagined by the anthropologist, just as many contemporary interpreters are expected to be in other working contexts.

Because anthropologists employ interpreters, and themselves are cultural interpreters, anthropologists' knowledge claims and professional status may motivate the erasure of interpreters' labor. To move forward, as a start, we might examine how methods curricula, grant-writing guidelines,

and research assistant training can evolve in order to more deeply consider the conditions of interpreters' labor. In our own research, we have each worked to develop practical forms of engaging the realities of interpreters' labor. These efforts include producing collaborative publications (Kunreuther et al. 2021); facilitating refugee interpreters' production of a fictional film, in which Laura was cast as one character, which was based on the challenges of their interpreting work at their camp (Bertrand 2022); and leveraging social scientific knowledge about labor to validate interpreters' own self-knowledge and claims for the legitimacy of their work as they organize for better working conditions, wages, and professional recognition (Rao 2021a,b).

Both anthropologists and interpreters are enmeshed in the paradoxes of the global political economy. Interpreters' labor, within the production of anthropological knowledge, generates important questions. Further, as figures who stand at the intersection of global economic and political projects, interpreters enable the movement of people, ideas, and capital across borders. An understanding of the invisible labor of interpreters disturbs the alleged transparency, neutrality, and ease of communication that is so foundational to the authority of institutions of global governance. The study of interpreters, their experiences, and the ideologies of voice and language within which they work offers ways to interrogate the contradictions of global capital and its related humanitarian enterprises.

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